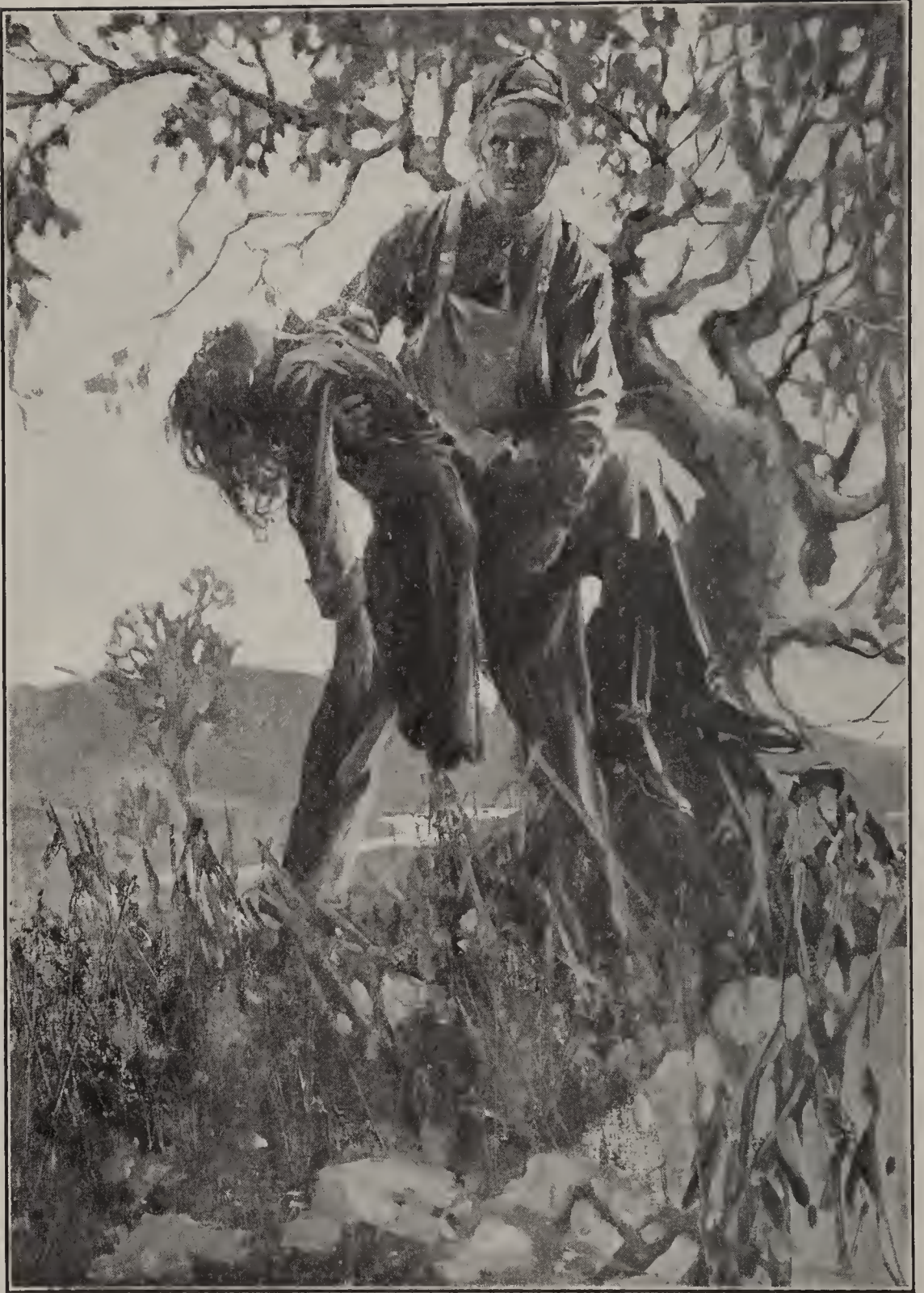


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HE LIFTED THE INERT BODY AND BORE IT CAREFULLY
THROUGH A BREACH IN THE WALL.

IN THE TENTH MOON

BY
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"The Body in the Blue Room"

Illustrated by
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In the Tenth Moon

CHAPTER I

A HAND IN THE DARKNESS

“BR-R-R-R! Br-r-r-r!”

“Yes, I’m coming. I’m coming,” the old butler muttered, fumbling his waistcoat buttons, released for the evening’s ease, a little in his haste.

“It’s late,” he grumbled, “for her bell.”

He put away his spectacles, and straightened his tie.

“Br-r-r-rr!”

“What’s the hurry, I’d like to know.”

With little sighs and half-articulated complaint he pushed open the pantry door, and started cautiously up the dark back stairs. No lights in the hall above. He felt his way along. What was the matter with everything! As he gained the upper level a gouty toe came into sharp contact with a newel post, and he paused a moment with an imprecation.

“Carlin.”

The voice stiffened him like a cold spray.

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“Yes, Madam.”

A little light came by a slightly opened door on the right, and a few yards down the hall. A woman's figure was silhouetted as she stood there. Though vouchsafed no vision of her dimly seen face, Carlin knew her voice as that of the wife of the elder son of the house, Mrs. Frank Slayton.

“It's got a lot in it that she don't let out,” a parlor maid once said, endeavoring to describe a certain effect of habitual self-repression. Carlin admired her for it, without seeking a reason, for he was a butler.

“There is trouble, Carlin.”

Her voice was a trifle higher-pitched than usual, but well controlled.

“Yes, Madam.”

“Mr. Slayton is hurt.”

“What shall I do, Mad ——”

She checked the word on his lips.

“Telephone to Doctor Gordon.”

“Yes, Madam.”

“And the police.”

Carlin flinched.

“Ye-es, Madam.”

“At once, Carlin.”

“Yes, Madam.”

He spoke to her back. The door closed behind her, softly, leaving him in darkness. Groping for a switch in the wall, he turned it twice in his nervousness, with an effect like that of a passing search-

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light. Then he turned it again, and the hall was flooded with sudden light.

He blinked once, twice, thrice. For shrinking against the wall near Mrs. Slayton's boudoir door was her maid, Marie.

"What's it all about, Mary?" Carlin demanded, regaining the hauteur of a major domo.

"I don't know." She spoke confusedly. "I was feeling my way in the dark."

"Br-r-r!"

"She's calling me again," Marie observed, edging past the butler. "I was up-stairs with Rachel."

The boudoir door closed again, so quickly Carlin's somewhat aged eyes could detect nothing within; and he was left alone.

"At once," he repeated to himself, as he walked stiffly to the telephone. The usual delay with late night calls attended, and he pursed his lips in disapproval.

"Yes. Very important. Police," he said at last, when a rather sleepy "Hello" came to his ears. He awaited results, full armed in dignity. Presently he spoke again—punctiliously:

"Yes, the police are wanted. I can't say what for. Mistress's order. Yes. This is Mr. Jacob Slayton's house. On the Avenue. . . . No. I can't say. I am informed Mr. Frank Slayton is hurt. Wanted at once. Yes."

Carlin hung up the receiver with a certain dig-

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nity. Even with things he was ceremonious. Then he looked up and down the hall. It was quiet, and warm, and still. The same as usual, yet somehow not the same. . . . He looked at the door of the green room, occupied by Mr. Frank Slayton, at the door of the blue room that was Mrs. Slayton's chamber. And at the door of the dressing-room between.

Of what was behind them he had no sign. With a half incredulous shake of his head he began thumbing the pages of a pocket memorandum. The desired number found, he took up the telephone again. This time he was brief, with no accent of condescension.

"This is Carlin, Doctor Gordon. Could you come at once? Yes, sir. Mrs. Frank Slayton's request. An accident to Mr. Slayton, sir."

The doctor's voice came briskly from the other end of the line. "All right. I'll be there within fifteen minutes."

Now Carlin pocketed his dignity to do an unprofessional thing. Carefully — but vainly, he listened outside each of the three doors of mystery. Not a sound rewarded him. So he carefully rose with readjusted dignity, and straightened his tie. As he went down the stairs, to await prospective arrivals at the front door, all the prestige of the Slaytons was incarnate in his person.

It was not long to wait. He heard the gong of the police patrol as it turned the corner, and saw

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it stop near the steps from his place at the window. Out jumped a sergeant and two burly roundsmen. Before he could admit them Doctor Gordon's car stopped by the opposite curb. And, bag in hand, the doctor himself hastened across the street.

"What's this?" he was saying as Carlin opened the door. "A police case, too!"

"They sent for us," the sergeant said. "That's all I know."

The doctor turned to Carlin inquiringly. He was a tall, thin man, and prematurely gray, with brilliant blue eyes that often emphasized a slightly mocking look. But their expression in that moment was deeply serious.

"What is it?" he asked the butler.

"I don't know, sir." One might have thought from Carlin's solemn manner that he spoke by order, non-committally. "I've just orders, sir, to take you all up-stairs."

Silently, after brief hesitation in which the officers gave way to the man of medicine, the four followed Carlin to the floor above. He knocked at the boudoir door. At the summons it was opened promptly by Marie, who stepped aside for them to enter. Only as Carlin moved to follow the others she closed the door quietly, but decisively, against his outraged face.

Mrs. Slayton rose as they stood at the threshold. A woman strikingly beautiful. The officers of the

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law probably would have preferred a more robust type, had they been in the least intent upon fleshly impressions. Her hair of the shade of beaten African gold was loosely coiled, and secured in a way that revealed its opulent abundance with a great silver pin. A robe of black, bordered with dark fur and belted with a curious Eastern girdle, loosely wrapped a figure of medium height and slender strength. Thus the pallor of her skin, with the hint of warmer ivory, was accentuated. And the mystery of eyes darkly blue.

“Come in,” she said. And the four entered.

“Frank is hurt.” She addressed Doctor Gordon, with a slight gesture toward the half-open dressing-room door. “In there. Will you look, please?”

“Certainly.”

There was more than professional interest in the doctor's mind as he passed the threshold of mystery. For he knew something of cross-currents in the Slayton mansion. But his air was none the less professional; even as professional as that of the officers tramping stolidly at his heels, with a glance at Mrs. Slayton like the irresolute look of a dog wondering if it may bite.

She did not follow them with her eyes. But when the feeling of their presence was past she lifted her right hand to her throat with a quick, sharp pressure, as if she would stifle an impulse to shriek. But her face, save for a feverish light in her eyes,

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retained its mask of cold composure. Seating herself before the dying fire in the grate, she gazed steadfastly at its embers.

What went on in the room beyond?

The doctor and the policemen gazed at the body before them. Before they touched it, professional and lay mind united in the conclusion that life was extinct. It wore the indefinable look of life's deserted mansion.

In evening dress, what remained of Frank Slayton lay on the dressing-room floor. He had fallen on his left side, about half-way between the wall and the hall door. His clothing was neither torn, it seemed, nor soiled. Nor was there any evident disarrangement of furniture, or any sign of a struggle. At first sight, hardly a trace of blood. But he was as dead as one of the Incas.

Death had come from behind, probably without warning. A shot to the base of the brain, and fired at close range. There were slight powder marks on the skin. Stooping the doctor noted how blood had stiffened a red rug on which the head lay. And he also saw a scrap of paper nearly hidden by the left thigh.

Then Doctor Gordon acted on impulse. It was his theory that impulse seldom leads one astray. Still crouched by the body, he seemed to listen with questioning interest to something outside the hall door. The three policemen, standing about like uneasy mastiffs, looked and listened, too.

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"Do you hear anything out there?" asked the doctor.

As one man they moved to the door.

"You look down the stairs," he heard the sergeant say.

With a swift movement, yet careful lest he tear it, he drew the scrap of paper from under the body, and devoured its written content:

"You get me the invitation, or there'll be trouble ——"

Unsigned, and seemingly unfinished. A woman's scrawl. And to it clung the scent of geranium. He thrust it into a coat pocket as he heard the officers again at the door.

"Find anything?" he said to the sergeant.

"Nobody there. How about you?"

"Murder."

The doctor rose, and carefully brushed his knees.

"Shot, and killed. Must have died almost instantly.

"Any clue?"

Stooping again to the body, the doctor raised the lid of a hooded eye. Its expression was peacefully glassy.

"I don't find a thing," he observed.

"I guess," said the sergeant, "I'll take a look around." He moved toward the dressing-room door.

"A moment, please." The doctor raised a detaining hand. "Let me prepare the widow."

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Mrs. Slayton stood with one hand on a table, waiting.

"I am sorry to say," the doctor announced gravely, "that Frank is dead."

"Yes."

The word came with tense steadiness from scarcely parted lips.

"And it seems"—the doctor hesitated to finish the sentence—"that he was murdered."

There was no wavering in the erect figure.

"I thought so," she said.

Now the sergeant, who had followed close behind, intervened.

"If you have any clues, Ma'am, time is valuable," he suggested.

"I will tell you what I know. But it is very little."

There was neither fear nor aversion in her voice. Neither pride nor supplication. She spoke as one might speak of something remote, impersonal. And the man of medicine feared it was the unnatural calm of one near the breaking point.

"Won't you have something to brace you?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Then at least sit down."

The sergeant pushed forward a chair, so that she sat with the light of a reading lamp full on her face. It was the first sign of the law conducting a criminal inquiry by process of elimination. A mo-

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ment's silence followed. Then one of the roundsmen coughed expectantly.

"I hardly know," she said, "how to begin."

"Just give us the story of the evening," the sergeant urged. "In your own way."

"It is such a strange story, you may find it impossible to believe. I only do because it is my own experience."

"We find strange things," said the sergeant sententiously.

"Not so strange as this. . . . You want the story of the evening. I suppose that begins with dinner. We dined alone."

" 'We' ? "

"I mean my husband and myself. There were no guests. And other members of the family were absent. . . . Afterward we played a while at cribbage. It was not very diverting to either of us. For I," with a slightly apologetic expression, "am a very poor player. . . . Then I read a while, and my husband was busy with some papers at his desk in the library. The story wasn't much more interesting than the game. So I went up to my boudoir."

"Where was your husband then?" asked the sergeant.

"I left him sitting at his desk. . . . When I went to my room I made my toilet for the night."

"Have you a maid? "

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To Doctor Gordon it seemed the sergeant's ears somehow pointed like those of a terrier.

"Yes."

"She was there, I suppose. All right. Go on."

"Marie brushed my hair. Then I sent her away. I was not in a mood to sleep. So I tried another book, not much better than the first one. . . . I think I must have grown drowsy. You know how it is sometimes, when you are not quite sure if you have slept a bit?"

It was the doctor who answered: "Yes, we know how that is."

"Thank you."

She gave him a look of gratitude, her first sign of sensitiveness.

"I don't know just what it was. A slight sound, or maybe the feeling one sometimes has of a strange influence near by. Whatever it was drew my eyes to the door opening from this room into the hall. I thought I saw the knob turn a bit. And I was curious enough to investigate."

"You were not frightened?"

Though he put it as a question, the sergeant's tone was more skeptical than interrogative.

"No," she answered quietly. "I have never been a timid person."

After brief silence, in which she seemed to await further questions, she went on.

"Now this is the incredible. So strange, I myself almost wonder if it really happened."

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The sergeant was licking his lips, like a dog that has relished a bone.

"I opened the door to darkness," she said. "In the surprise of it I stepped into the hall. It was perfectly quiet, and I felt my way along toward the electric switch that is only a few yards, as you will see, from my door. I must have almost reached it when a cloth saturated with something was suddenly and violently pressed over my mouth. And an arm about my shoulders forced me against the wall."

"You called for help, didn't you?" the sergeant suggested.

"No. For I couldn't. The man was too strong. And the chloroform began to work."

"How do you know it was a man?"

"Surely, that is simple enough. By his strength, by the feeling of his hand and arm,—his clothing, the whole feeling of personality."

She regarded her inquisitor patiently.

"And how did you know it was chloroform?" he pursued, professional skepticism again overcoming him.

"I know its odor and effect. I nursed two years at a base hospital in France," she explained.

Doctor Gordon, who had been standing with an elbow on the mantel over the fireplace, listening with eyes on the embers, turned to the sergeant with a look of irritation.

"Don't you think," he asked acidly, "that Mrs.

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Slayton may be allowed to tell her story in her own way, without this cross questioning. She is not on the witness stand, is she? ”

“ No,” said the sergeant respectfully, suppressing a natural inclination to bluster. “ Just tell it in your own words, Ma’am.”

She looked at the doctor with a flicker of gratefulness, and clasped her hands a little tighter as she resumed.

“ I knew I was losing consciousness, but could do nothing to prevent it. . . . Then it came. I can’t tell how long I lay there. It must have been, I suppose, only a short time. For in the last two hours it has all happened. . . . When I came to I was lying on the hall floor. And it was still dark and quiet. At first I didn’t know where I was, or what had happened. Then it came to me,— what I have told you, and all I know now. . . . I managed to rise, and reach this room. The very chair I am sitting in now. I felt faint and dizzy, as one does after inhaling chloroform. So I called to Frank.”

“ Meaning ——? ” the sergeant interjected.

“ My husband, Mr. Slayton.”

She hesitated, and the doctor noted a slight movement of her shoulders, as of a suppressed shiver. But her voice kept its coldly even quality as she resumed.

“ He didn’t answer. So I summoned energy enough to rise, and look for him. I thought per-

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haps he was in his bedroom, and had not heard me. . . . When I stepped into the dressing-room I saw him lying there on the floor. I spoke again, and he didn't answer. Then I thought he had been treated as I was, and hadn't recovered from the chloroform. I got smelling salts. But of course they did no good."

"Did you realize then what had happened?"

Again the sergeant's instinct of investigation overcame his promise of silence.

"No," she said. "But I knew it was something of a serious nature. I couldn't get his pulse. And there were blood stains in the rug under his head. At first I didn't see them in the red of the pattern. . . . Whatever it was, I could do nothing. So I rang for Carlin to summon aid."

"It didn't occur to you, under the circumstances, to telephone yourself?" the sergeant asked.

"No, it didn't." She looked at him with a tincture of surprise. "I did what seemed to me a perfectly natural thing."

"And what made you think of the police, Ma'am?"

"No definite reason. Except that it seemed what I ought to do. I had been attacked; and my husband was hurt by someone."

"About what time did the attack on you happen?" Before she could answer the sergeant looked at his watch, adding,—“It's about midnight now.”

"I can't be precise. But just before I stopped

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reading I looked at my wrist-watch. It was a little after ten then. It may have been a half-hour later when I started to see if there was anything wrong in the hall. But I can only guess."

"Who was in the house?"

Now the sergeant was more businesslike, and less deferential. The doctor regarded him with unconcealed irritation. He opened his lips to speak, but suppressed his protest.

"I cannot tell," Mrs. Slayton replied. "But Carlin knows."

She pressed a button in the table beside her. Then they waited—it seemed to them very long. Less rapid than their heart-beats, but moving with unwonted alacrity, the old butler's feet were bearing him upward from the pantry. It was a matter of minutes, but two or three, before he entered with his almost priestly air.

His mistress acknowledged his appearance with a passing glance.

"These gentlemen," she said quietly, "would like to know who has been in the house to-night, Carlin. I have told them you are the person best qualified to inform them."

"Yes, Madam."

The butler turned to the sergeant with a preliminary cough.

"The servants are in attendance at a party. All but Mary, and Rachel. And"—Carlin's pause was indicative of the gap in rank—"myself."

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“Where are Mary and Rachel?”

“This is Marie.” Mrs. Slayton lightly touched the arm of her shrinking, sweet-faced maid. “And Rachel is a chambermaid.”

“I was with her up-stairs.” The maid’s voice was hardly raised above a whisper.

“Have her down,” the sergeant said. “Who else has been in the house since afternoon? Any of the family?”

“Mr. Slayton—Mr. Jabez Slayton has not returned from his club. And Mr. George is out.”

“They’d better be sent for.”

“Excuse me, Madam.” Carlin turned to his mistress, subtly deferential again. “I took the liberty of doing so.”

“Thank you, Carlin. That was very thoughtful.” She spoke gently now, with a certain tenderness. “And did you reach them?”

“Mr. Slayton was at the club, Madam. He will be here presently.”

“And Mr. George?”

“I’m not quite sure. He said to call Mr. Struthers, if anyone wanted him. I did call, and he wasn’t there. Harry,—Mr. Struthers’ man, said they expected him soon. So I left a message.”

“Thank you, Carlin. You have done all you could.”

The butler’s grateful bow ushered in a minute or so of electrical silence. Those in the room might have posed for a tableau. Two policemen by the

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door, with the superfluous look of chorus men in opera. Mrs. Slayton sitting at the table, where the full light fell upon her mercilessly, yet revealed no tremor, or quick change of startled blood. At her elbow the maid Marie, shrinking yet staunch. Carlin, with his look of one at once affronted and apprehensive. The doctor, with a certain air of studious detachment. And the sergeant stroking his chin, as one brooding deeply.

“Did your husband have a revolver?”

The head of danger, like the red crest of running fire, rose suddenly on the horizon. But Mrs. Slayton seemed merely thoughtful.

“I don’t know,” she said after a moment’s meditation. Then she qualified her statement. “But I remember now I have seen one on his dresser.”

“What calibre?” pressed the sergeant.

“I can’t say. I never examined it. And I know nothing about firearms.”

Her inquisitor pondered.

“How did it sound when he was shot?” he finally asked.

“I think I told you that I heard no report.”

“Well, then ——” the sentence perished on his lips. For there came a knocking, a rather imperative knocking, at the door.

“Come in,” said Mrs. Slayton in a voice so low it did not carry to the one without.

With a hasty stride the doctor reached the door, and opened it wide.

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A young man of slightly dishevelled appearance stood there, returning the glances of the party with interest.

“What’s all the row about?”

No prompt answer forthcoming, he pursued his inquiry.

“What are the police doing here?”

“Frank is killed,” said the doctor bluntly.

“Dead!” as if the word were wrenched from him. He stiffened, and turned pale. Then, with a slow look, he turned to his sister-in-law. But Mrs. Slayton was no longer looking at him. Her eyes seemed fixed on some conjured vision. She did not speak. The others, too, were silent. Then, with obvious effort, he jerkily resumed; a double question:

“How did it happen? Why didn’t you let me know before?”

He addressed Carlin now, and spoke imperatively.

“We did our best, sir. You may remember you told me to telephone to Mr. Struthers’ apartment, if anything important came up.”

“Did you?”

“Yes, Mr. George. And Harry, Mr. Struthers’ man, said they expected you soon.”

“I did intend to. But I didn’t feel like playing bridge. So I came home.”

“About what time was that?”

The tip of the sergeant’s tongue, like the tail of

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a little snake, moved rapidly across his lips. The only remaining son of Jabez Slayton regarded him with seeming curiosity.

“About ten o’clock, I guess. I don’t know exactly when. Didn’t look at my watch.”

“Where did you go—I mean what did you do, then?”

Young Mr. Slayton stood a little straighter, and red came to his cheek. Seeing him in profile, the doctor noted a suggestion of the granitic quality of old Jabez, who still bore the impress of strenuous victory in his deeply-seamed face. As yet his younger son had only a good fellow’s reputation. Men liked him, and women, too, for a certain amiable frankness, and the candor of gray eyes that habitually seemed bent on smiling. Now they were rather cold and very steady; and the forward thrust of the head brought out the long, strong line of the Slayton chin. And he seemed taller than the five feet, ten inches or so with which the yardstick credited him.

But if he was displeased at the manner of the sergeant’s questioning he did not show it in his voice. He answered courteously:

“You ask where I went. In the house, I suppose you mean. Nowhere but the library, until I came here. I sat down to look at the *London Sporting News*. But I didn’t get far in it. I woke with it in my hand.”

“Didn’t you hear any disturbance?”

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“Not a thing out of the common.”

“But your brother was shot.”

“So I learn—now. Naturally, I was not listening for a noise of that sort. And I was on the floor below toward the rear of the house. Also I was asleep. . . . Probably,” he added reflectively, “it was the motor of your patrol wagon running outside that roused me.”

His explanation sank into silence. Mrs. Slayton looked up. For a moment her eyes were on his face. Then she looked away again. His eyes unwaveringly engaged those of the sergeant.

“Well,” the officer asserted, “there’s a murderer somewhere about. But we make no headway in finding him.” He closed his note-book with a snap, and thrust it into a breast pocket. “I’d like to go over the house.”

“Let me show you,” George Slayton said courteously.

They went out together. And Doctor Gordon followed them. Last trailed the two roundsmen, after a moment of uncertainty in which they looked at Mrs. Slayton, who seemed unaware of their existence. Leaning slightly forward, with folded hands, she looked steadily at the cooling ashes of the grate. She gave no sign of consciousness of the inquiry below.

Led by young Mr. Slayton, the party went down the broad front stairs, and turned left, past a man in armor, and an old Spanish cabinet, to where a

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shaft of pale light marked the library door. It was partly open as they went in.

Now the sergeant took precedence. Staying those behind with a gesture, he took a brisk observation. Nothing in that much repaid him. A reading lamp was on, apparently as George Slayton had left it. And a London weekly, probably dropped in sleep, lay on the floor near by. On the table a pipe, the usual supply of tobacco and accessories, paper and pens, a few magazines—the miscellanea of such places. Mentally checking them off, the sergeant peered into the shadows.

“Can we have more light?” he said curtly.

“Certainly.”

Slayton stooped to a button, and a cluster of lights in the ceiling burst into bloom.

“Ah!”

With the word the officer strode to a window behind the desk and a few yards distant. It was open, almost to the full extent of the lower sash; he leaned out to see what was below and beyond. Some six feet from the ground, it gave on a passageway between the Slayton house and the equally imposing, glumly ostentatious dwelling next door. Somewhat shaded by trees, a light across the Avenue accentuated its shadows with feeble rays. As the sergeant swept it with his eyes, to where it met a mysterious area in the rear, a furtive cat was all the life it revealed.

“How long has this been open?” he asked.

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"I opened it," Slayton explained, "when I sat down to read. It was pretty warm."

"And you fell asleep?"

"I thought I told you that."

"Sound asleep?"

"I don't know. I wasn't at the same time awake, taking notes."

"You wouldn't have heard anybody climbing in?"

"See here, Sergeant, what's the use of asking such questions? I thought you were looking for a clue to my brother's murderer."

The hound of the law ignored young Slayton's manifest resentment.

"So I am," he said imperturbably. "You never know what'll turn into something."

He walked to the window again, and took another look up and down.

"So far's opportunity is concerned," he observed, "we don't need to look further. Any lively man could climb in there. And with you a-snoozing he'd have his chance to kill, or steal. Maybe both. We don't know yet if anything is missing from the house."

"What's that?"

"A little accident," the doctor explained. "I carelessly knocked a glass from a corner of the desk."

He stooped to look more closely at minute pieces shining on the darkly polished floor. No one noted

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that before the glass fell with a tinkling sound he had lifted it to his nose, and appraised the dregs of its contents with a swift breath. For a few seconds afterward he regarded Slayton with a certain curiosity.

“Well,” the sergeant suggested, “let’s go on back.”

Once more the little procession silently ascended the stairs. But this time Carlin did not lead. With a feeling of personal injury, even of affront in what had befallen, he laggardly brought up the rear.

Young Slayton knocked at the boudoir door, and opened it, on receiving a call,—“Come in.” His brother’s widow still sat by the fireplace, with its cheerless ashes. There was no sign that she had stirred in their absence.

“One thing we have found out, anyway,” the sergeant announced.

Her eyes questioned him.

“How somebody might get in,” he continued. “There’s an open window on the ground floor. Jones,” with a sudden sharpness to one of his men, “go back and lock it. We might have another crime in the house. There’s plenty of light-fingered and heavy-handed gents about.”

The roundsman addressed went out silently. The sergeant produced his note-book, and moistened his pencil on his tongue.

“Now, Ma’am, is there anything missing?”

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"I haven't investigated."

"Suppose you take a look."

She stepped to her dressing-table, and inventoried its scattered treasures.

"I miss a diamond pin I wore at dinner," she said presently.

"Describe it."

The sergeant's pencil was poised aloft.

"Just a simple circle of diamonds in a gold setting. Good stones, but far from the best."

"Is that all?"

"So far."

Opening a drawer in her dressing-table, she turned over its contents.

"What about your ruby ring?" George Slayton suggested. "You wore it in the afternoon."

"Yes, that is gone, too." She looked at her hand, as if still in doubt of its absence, and glanced again over the jewels before her.

"Describe it."

Now the sergeant was warming to his work.

"It was a rather heavy ring. A ruby set in diamonds—four of them. And the ruby has a black speck near the base."

"That would be easy to identify."

He wrote "black speck near the base" carefully.

"Are you sure that's all?"

"I think so. At least, there's nothing else I know of now."

The sergeant closed his note-book, and tucked it

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away. And with the act his manner changed. He spoke now with a trace of the police official's customary accent of intimidation:

"Where's the cloth they chloroformed you with?"

"Here."

She turned to take it from the table, holding it by her finger-tips. With equal care the sergeant received it, holding it cautiously under his nose.

"Sure enough chloroform. And must have been pretty well loaded."

He held it up to the light.

"No laundry mark. And no initial. Thousands of handkerchiefs like it sold every day. I'm afraid it won't help us much. But you never can tell."

Carefully folded, the handkerchief was added to the contents of a capacious wallet. The sergeant took another observation, and punctuated it with, "Well." He would have added, "I guess we'd better be going," but the sound of a motor came to his ears. He listened, and the others with him.

They heard the engine shut off, the slam of the door. And, since a boudoir window was open to the warm night air, the rasp of boots on the doorstep, and the sharp tapping of a stick came to their ears. Then a door under the window was closed with a certain decisiveness.

"Who's that?" asked the sergeant.

"My father, I think," George Slayton answered.

He did not go to meet him. Only Carlin, regain-

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ing his customary slightly pompous air, left the room. The others stood there in silence. It was but a minute or two they had to wait. Then an imperative rap on the door.

"Come in," called Mrs. Slayton.

Evidently permission was unimportant to the one without. With the words on her lips the door was opened. And what remained of the Slayton family became complete.

"Did you get a message, Father?" George asked.

"Yes," snapped Jabez.

His cold gray eyes inventoried the little group. It was a look that had caused many men to shiver. And his shaven cheeks were like corrugated iron. One might have thought he had come as a steel king, not as a bereaved father.

"What's this I hear?" he demanded.

"Frank is dead," said the doctor laconically.

"It can't be true."

"It is true."

The doctor met his contradiction, harsh with an undertone of anguish, in gentle firmness.

"But I left him well."

"It's murder," said the doctor.

Jabez turned to his remaining son. It was a piercing look he gave him, a deliberately sustained inspection. George flushed, but did not wince under it.

"So you're all I have left now," his father said at length, and turned to the doctor.

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“Where’s the body?”

“In here.”

After him marched Jabez, with the air of one outraged, not crushed. Without a word to the widow of his elder son he left the room. If she was affected by his behavior, she did not show it. But it was discussed by the policemen as they went down the steps. And, passed on to his superiors by the diligent sergeant, it bore on a development of the Slayton case.

For a moment George and his brother’s widow were left together. No words were spoken. But stooping, he touched with gentle fingers her bowed head. Then the doctor reëntered.

“Father ——?” George questioned.

“Has gone to his rooms. And you’d better follow suit.”

“But there are things to do.”

“Nothing for you. I’ll attend to everything.”

“If you don’t mind ——”

“But I do mind. And you’ve got to. Here.” From his bag he took a small phial, and shook two tablets into his palm. “Take one of these in a little water. And now get to bed. You’re done up.”

Still he lingered.

“Good-night, George,” said Mrs. Slayton quietly.

“Good-night, Leila.”

She did not raise her eyes as he slowly left the room. Not until she heard the door close softly behind him. Then for the first time the doctor saw

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in her set features how she struggled with a heavy strain.

“ You have been very brave,” he said.

“ We must bear the inevitable.”

She spoke as one noting a simple fact.

He did not at the moment sense anything curious in her statement. She had slightly turned away, as though more fully to commune with herself. And he, to check brooding upon what must be monstrous, began gently to prepare her for certain painful requirements of the law in cases of doubtful or obviously violent death.

Soon the undertaker's men came on their dolorous mission, transporting what was mortal of Frank Slayton to the private morgue. Then the doctor, too, departed, leaving the house in darkness.

Within its silent walls Jabez slept, being very old and stoical. But his son's widow looked with burning eyes into the shadows. . . . And George Slayton kept a secret.

CHAPTER II

THE THIRTY-EIGHT IN THE CHIFFONIER

ANOTHER morning.

When Carlin appeared to collect the papers dew was yet fresh on guardian lions that flanked Jabez Slayton's steps. But, early as it was, the reporters of evening papers swarmed there to amplify the morning news.

Carlin repelled them with difficulty and a jammed thumb. Then he disconnected the telephone, which had been ringing with unheeded persistence since crack of dawn, and bore his booty to the pantry. The cook was there, with other habitués of the early conference below stairs; and one arrival they viewed with astonishment.

"Couldn't you sleep, my girl?" said Carlin to Rachel, the chambermaid reported as having been with Mrs. Slayton's maid, Marie, that fateful hour of the evening before. Rachel only shook her head.

"Tell us something," importuned the cook, who was comparatively new to the household, and thought no more of the Slayton heir's death than of the demise of any other presumably rackety son of great wealth. "You must know a little about it."

"If you know what I know, there's no need of

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my telling it to you," Rachel observed, and would say no more. And it is not on record that the police and lawyers, armed with authority, had better luck with her in later queries.

The officials suspected Mrs. Slayton's maid, Marie, held something back in devotion to her mistress. But Rachel was a puzzle. A big girl, with auburn hair and a wide mouth, and a rare capacity for silence. She only listened in the pantry pow-wow that followed.

Reading papers before the family was not a safe habit for servants in Jabez Slayton's household. But for once Carlin threw discretion to the winds, with scattered sheets. Soon his kingdom was agog.

In every morning daily of New York,—even, it is safe to say, the foreign sheets of the swarming East Side, the Slayton murder was a first-page spread. More conservative members of the press were content with black type. But those virtuous journals consecrated to interests of the poor revelled in red ink and pictorial display.

There was the Slayton mansion on the Avenue. The Slayton house at the shore. Jabez's modest home at the time of his marriage; even his alleged birthplace on English Dartmoor. Frank Slayton in an infantry captain's uniform, and George on a polo pony. Lack of Leila Slayton's photograph was no bar to display. With a caption,—“The Enigma of the Case,” they beheld her name affixed to the likeness of a Spanish lady with downy lip.

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“Slumgullions!” said Carlin resentfully, and crumpled the page. What he might have added remained unknown. The sharp ringing of George Slayton’s bell diverted his attention.

“Up after midnight,” he grumbled, “and hard at it again early in the morning. . . . Now straighten out here ——” to the other servants.

Young Mr. Slayton was disclosed to Carlin’s eyes somewhat haggard but composed. He took his coffee and eggs as usual, the while he viewed in silence sensational embroideries of the press. Only he stepped heavily on one blatant sheet when he rose from the table and ground it as if he would crush the writer under his heel.

Then he went down-stairs, and began a careful examination of the hall and library. If he had a special object in view, the possibility that something else might turn up was not overlooked.

It was not until he raised the window shades a little higher, for a second general survey of the room, that anything rewarded him. It was caught in the fringe of the library portières. A monocle on a silken cord. From the height at which it hung one might guess it had been caught and detached from someone’s waistcoat pocket in entering or leaving the room.

Taking it into the full morning light by a window, Slayton applied the monocle to his left eye. Now he closed his right eye to get a better test. It was a powerful lens of unusual grinding. George

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took note of its curious whorls. He was still turning it in his hand as he went back to his rooms.

Mrs. Slayton did not come down that day. Even Carlin did not see her. To Doctor Gordon she sent word she was grateful for his interest, but in no need of his aid. Only Marie was with her. And to Marie she was both sun and moon.

Before sunset old Jabez had made a new will, and endowed a hospital. Thus the eminent attorney called to draw the instrument whetted the interest of reporters who picketed the house, even to its cellar windows.

Truth to tell, in its first phase the Slayton case thinned out rapidly as a newspaper sensation. Police and reporters were equally at sea. Even city editors,—those men gifted in writing a volume of fancy from a scrap of fact, turned elsewhere in weariness. . . . But the “Big Thing” did break. And of the case’s eclipse we speak in weeks,—not months.

Silly as it may seem, a Ouija board gave the police the clue to their start. An evening newspaper had it first. Thanks to a constant reader who called with a supposed message from the spirit of her husband,—in this life a policeman.

“LOOK IN HER SECOND BUREAU DRAWER”

That was the message. To the police “Her” meant Mrs. Slayton. No other woman had appeared in the case.

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“What do you say?” queried the superintendent, who took no stock in spirits, but was sensitive to criticism. “Anything might be worth trying. The papers are giving us hell.”

“We’ve got to show a little life somehow,” observed the chief of inspectors. And he went forth in person, with two of his men.

It was a time of day when most women of the seldom idle rich are at a *matinée*, or shopping, or perhaps lingering at one of those lunches where to see and be seen is quite as important as delicacies consumed. Leila Slayton was engaged in none of these. Nor was she mourning as ritual prescribes.

She was sitting at her boudoir window, looking out into the park, where sunlight played, and frisking squirrels and children mocked her mood. For weeks seeming like months she had lived under the harrow of unspoken, and thus the more intolerable, suspicion. And her face just then, with no need of the mask of pride, showed the strain.

“I suppose I must go down,” she said as Marie with manifest reluctance came to announce more “Officer men” were waiting below.

“But it is that they would come up,” Marie explained.

“Very well,” her mistress said, and looked about. “I see nothing to prevent.”

The chief inspector came alone, taking the open door as a sign of invitation. He was not flattered by his reception. For he was driven to the ex-

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tremity of coughing to notify Mrs. Slayton of his presence. She turned from the window with a slight inclination of her head, and a composed, "Good-afternoon. Did you knock?"

"No, Ma'am."

To himself the inspector's answer sounded school-boyish. He made haste to bolster himself in the feeling of authority. With her inquiring look, Mrs. Slayton waited for him to continue.

"I wonder," he said, "what changes have been made in these rooms, Mrs. Slayton, since your husband's death."

"None, that I know of."

"Then things are just as they were?"

"I suppose so." She did not seem keenly interested in his inquiry, but added: "Except, of course, what happens incidentally in servants' care of a room."

The chief inspector meditated, biting his underlip. Then he put his next question:

"Has a thorough search of the various pieces of furniture been made?"

"I don't think so."

Though she did not say it, her face asked the question,—“Why?”

"Sometimes valuable clues turn up where they are least expected," the inspector observed.

"I have no objection to a search," she said, and turned to the window.

Somewhat nonplussed, the inspector was by no

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means paralyzed. Her extraordinary behavior was not without advantage to him as an officer. With the glint of satisfaction in his eyes he stepped briskly to a chiffonier.

The top drawer opened, he paused before its array of frilly finery. Even to a policeman, examination of a lady's lingerie in her presence was not without embarrassment.

"You don't care to go through the drawers yourself?" he suggested.

"No, thank you."

Her back still turned, he pulled the drawer wide open, and began his gingerly search. It would have puzzled him to make an inventory of the contents. But at least he knew he found nothing of importance.

"Look in the second drawer,"—the Ouija board had advised. The inspector opened it without enthusiasm. More stuff than the first drawer contained was revealed; petticoats, camisoles, and the like. Having removed a few, he pressed here and there with exploring fingers. Nothing rewarded him. And he closed the drawer with a little bang.

Mrs. Slayton turned at the sound. "Have you finished?" she asked.

"No, Ma'am."

The inspector felt his face redden again at the humble idiom.

"Please do not let me embarrass you."

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She turned once more to the mid-afternoon brightness of the park.

For a moment he hesitated. Then stooped again, with an aggressive thrust of his shoulders. The third drawer. More petticoats, stockings, sheer mysteries he did not seek to fathom.

Feeling nervously about, his hand came in contact with something that turned him into a statue of rigid astonishment.

His eyes turned instinctively to that back at the window. To the figure that seemed so completely oblivious of his presence. Then, feverishly, he felt again, and looked triumphant. With an impatient jerk that scattered garments right and left he held his discovery up to feasting eyes.

“Is this your revolver?”

Mrs. Slayton turned to behold the weapon extended. And a transformed inspector, with a threat in voice and manner. He no longer saw a woman surrounded by millions, a superior being who somehow subdued him to humble speech. Now a possible criminal was before him. But she neither trembled nor turned pale. Her face registered only surprise.

“No,” she answered, and looked at the revolver with seeming curiosity.

“How did it get here?” he demanded, tapping the open drawer.

“I don’t know.” She looked at him inquiringly. “Did you find it there?”

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"It would be better," he said sternly, "to tell the truth."

She did not answer. With a slight shrug of her shoulders she turned again to the widow. Hands clasped behind her back, she stood looking across the Avenue into leafy fastnesses. Was it disdain? Or hardihood?

The inspector regarded her with a heavy frown. Then, with an incredulous shake of his head, he turned again to his prize. A French pistol, calibre 38, and one cartridge discharged. With the inquiring nose of an expert at small arms he sniffed at the barrel. Then he held the weapon higher, to get a stronger light. It had not been fired within a few hours. More, casual examination did not determine.

Dropping the revolver into a pocket, he removed the contents of the drawer that had held it, to the last stitch. Then he went through the remaining drawers with equal care. It was fruitless. But he had his great prize. Feeling it in his pocket, he bent his gaze again upon that back seemingly so impassive, so inhumanly calm. It was not thus that criminals behaved. Nor yet, in his experience, the deportment of the innocent circumstantially threatened. What was brutal within him, both the man and the official resolved to break down her barrier of icy calm. His voice was harshly peremptory as he next addressed her:

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“Have you any explanation of the revolver now?”

“No. Do you want me to make up one?”

She did not turn. The inspector buttoned up his coat. He had seen many a suspect composed enough in familiar surroundings crumble under police interrogation in the shadow of the jail. But one observation escaped his lips, as he turned to the door:

“You will be at home to-night?”

Put in the form of a question, it had an undertone of command.

“I think so,” she assented.

His last vision was of a woman who seemed still oblivious, even unconscious, of the potential instrument of death,—death by the law’s decree, in his pocket. As he drove away with his subordinates he sat silent, with a puzzled frown, and little shakes of his grizzled head.

“I can’t make her out,” he reported to the superintendent. “I’ve seen brassy ones, and sassy ones, and the kind that cries. This woman acts as if she had nothing to do with the case. And this is real evidence, or I’m a boob.” He looked at the revolver almost lovingly. “Same calibre Slayton was shot with,” he added.

“Well,” said his superior, “I never saw one, guilty or innocent, that wouldn’t talk in the end. If this woman feels herself injured by suspicion, she has a chance to help set us on the right trail.”

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“Then we’d better bring her down?”

The chief inspector’s eagerness was manifest. The superintendent stroked his nose.

“Let’s see what the district attorney says,” he observed finally. “Get him on the ’phone.”

The conference occurred, and spread. The district attorney was there; likewise his chief of medical examiners. And the police commissioner himself sat in. With a city election coming on, there was too much dynamite in the Slayton case for precipitate action. If the voters have a way of praising at the polls, they are even quicker to censure.

But there was enough, by all rules of the game, to justify interrogation. The bullet removed from Slayton’s brain of the same calibre as the cartridges in the revolver found in his wife’s dresser. And from that weapon one bullet had been fired. . . . The widow had possession of the lethal firearm. And indisputably she had opportunity to kill her husband. It was not in evidence that any other person was near, save in her wild tale of mysterious drugging. Ample evidence, urged the district attorney, for taking her into custody.

“I don’t want to arrest at this time,” the police commissioner objected. “Suppose she used the revolver, and hid it in her bureau. Then why didn’t she put it later in a less dangerous place? She must have known it was there, and had plenty of chances.”

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Cunning, the district attorney answered, or the timidity of a novice in crime.

“And the motive?” pressed the commissioner.

“There’s a back-stairs story,” the chief inspector remarked, “about a disagreement between Slayton and his wife that night. A maid told one of our men she heard them jawing.”

“Still, I can’t believe a woman of her intelligence would leave the revolver in her room for you to find it, if she had reason to dread its discovery,” the commissioner persisted. “We’ve got to question her. But I draw the line on arrest just now. Unless,”—he turned to the district attorney, “you insist upon it. It’s your right, if you want to.”

“Have your way,” said the prosecutor a bit sulkily. “I was the goat in the Foroney case. That’ll do for a while.”

That evening a dark motor stopped at Jabez Slayton’s door. And two plain clothes men stepped out. Their summons was not unexpected. For the chief inspector’s discovery of a revolver in Leila Slayton’s chiffonier was known to both Jabez and George.

The old man took the first overt act of the authorities against his daughter-in-law with one suggestion.

“I’ll send my lawyer down with you, if the police will let him in.”

“Thanks,” she said quietly. “I prefer to go alone.”

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"All right," he assented. With the inscrutable glance men had dreaded in business he made measured exit from the room.

"What does it mean, Leila?"

Desperate intensity colored George's question.

"It's as much a mystery to me," she replied.

"It is damnable," he said fiercely.

If he had thought of accompanying her to police headquarters, the escorting officers made plain that would not be permitted.

"Your pardon, sir," said one as he came with Leila to the door. Flanked on either side, she was on the steps in a twinkling. And almost before Slayton realized it she was gone. But he followed after, as she was whirled down-town, through the gay and gabbling after-theatre crowd. And he sat in his roadster, silently waiting outside the dark pile of headquarters, with a few windows outlined in cautious light, until the immediate ordeal was over.

While the morning press made much of discovery of a revolver in Leila Slayton's boudoir, their alert reporters knew nothing of the heavily veiled woman admitted to the police commissioner's office by his private entrance. The commissioner himself was there, and the district attorney, who promptly took the laboring oar. He was a strong believer in frontal attack.

"We have sent for you, Mrs. Slayton, to ask you a question."

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"Yes," she assented without evidence of trepidation.

"What did you and your husband quarrel about the night he was killed?"

"I wouldn't say that we did quarrel."

"You had no disagreement?"

"Yes," she admitted. "Just that."

"What was it about?"

"I don't think it has anything to do with his death," she fended, with momentary hesitation.

"Perhaps you are not the best judge of that."

The district attorney's voice was charged with sarcasm. With his next question it took on a sudden cutting edge.

"Did you have trouble over a woman?"

"Yes."

Her reply conveyed only the barest monosyllabic significance.

"Tell us about it."

Another momentary pause. Then she answered calmly:

"I'm sorry. But I can't do that."

"Then you have nothing further to say about it?"

She bowed affirmatively. Within five minutes of her arrival they had reached this impasse. Now the police commissioner took a hand. There was nothing threatening in his manner. Rather it was fatherly.

"I trust you realize, Mrs. Slayton," he said,

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“that we are not actuated by personal curiosity in these questions.”

“Certainly.”

She gave no sign of wavering. But as she sat very straight in her chair, her hands were clasped with such tensivity it seemed the interlocking fingers would never loosen. Below her partially lifted veil her lips were pale and very firm. There was curiosity in the look the commissioner bent upon her. Curiosity, and something akin to pity.

“And you know, do you not,” he went on, “that certain circumstances have made your present position somewhat unfortunate?”

“I realize that.”

“And still you cannot answer the question just asked?”

“It is impossible.”

“We thank you for the visit,” the district attorney said suavely. “I only regret it was not more to your advantage.”

He turned to collect papers on a table beside him. The commissioner pressed a button. As if summoned by Aladdin’s lamp, the waiting detectives appeared. The immediate ordeal was over.

Without further words, but saluted with polite bows, she passed from headquarters to the waiting car. A little to the rear came her police escort. Once more they drove rapidly through the intermediate region of the “Great White Way,” on to quiet reaches of the upper Avenue. Far behind

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followed George, furious victim to a street blockade.

Old Jabez was waiting, but asked no questions. One remembering his behavior the night of the murder might have suspected something bordering on disappointment in his expression. With a formal, "Good-night" he went stiffly up to his rooms.

But Marie waited, adoring, with all her heart in one word:

"Madame!"

And her tears of love were as ointment to a lacerated spirit.

Night passed. The morning brought the blow. Again Leila Slayton was called to police headquarters. And that time she did not return.

CHAPTER III

JUST A SCRAP OF PAPER

“THE Reverse English:”

It happened that on the day of Leila Slayton's arrest for the murder of her husband a poor Polish woman was taken for killing her lover. She confessed, and justified herself on the ground of infidelity. Thus the saffron press, licking a morsel of back-stairs gossip, found a way to insinuate what it dared not assert. It suggested a parallel between the fury of Bleeker Street and the “Enigma of Fifth Avenue.”

Mrs. Slayton said nothing. Nor did Jabez or his surviving son issue any statement. Their mutual repugnance was deepened by Mr. Robert Kent's aversion to publicity; or at least to premature publicity. Long accustomed to sitting in the presence of the financially august, and making confidential suggestions to appellate judges, Mr. Kent had turned back to criminal practice for the nonce at Jabez's behest. A favor of questionable benefit. For Mr. Kent, with all his allurements of genially courtly personality, and his undoubted eminent standing, was far removed from sprightly tricks of criminal practice. One of those able young lawyers wolfing his way upward might better have served Leila in her tragic predicament.

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There was no talk of bail, after a tentative suggestion the district attorney violently opposed. He had instant vision of "Discrimination in Favor of the Rich" chanted against himself in the impending election. George did what he could for Leila, when she would consent to see him. And Marie was indefatigable. But inevitably she suffered. To the gently nurtured, prison life is terrible, even at its best. But no one saw her flinch, or weep.

One boon, if it were to hasten the swinging open of prison gates, was vouchsafed her. Backed by the Slayton millions, and the professional prestige of Robert Kent, an early date on the trial calendar was obtained. . . . The district attorney objected vigorously. With blended vehemence and ready pathos he reminded the court of all the men and women of lowly station, who had no one to cushion imprisonment, waiting weary months for their day in court. He spoke feelingly of equality of all before the law, and won the coveted place on the newspaper page. But the court overruled him.

The district attorney was a politician-at-law rejoicing in the name of Isaac Vickery. He pleaded the need of more time required to prepare the state's case. What he really hoped was that somehow or other more evidence for the prosecution would be turned up. In the back of his head nestled a surmise that Leila herself would unwittingly strengthen the case against her.

Weeks wore on, and as the time of trial ap-

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proached the city press again brought the name of Slayton to the fore. It had been some years since New York newspaper readers revelled in a society murder case. Now city editors proposed to make the most of this one. Court attachés charged with provision for multitudinous reporters and photographers, all timed to the second in visualization of a *cause célèbre*, groaned with their labor. Preparation for trial by the state and the defense seemed comparatively simple.

Apparently, it would be a trial strictly upon the evidence. It was not intimated that the defense would set up a claim of emotional insanity, or any other variation of mental weakness. For once "Dementia Americana" failed to rear its head. And the alienists would have no pickings.

Would the defendant take the stand? Only Leila and Mr. Kent knew. What he thought of her story, at which the police scoffed, he kept to himself. He seemed to find the case very simple. Too simple even. As the time drew near she felt added to the major terror of her position the loneliness of an abandoned child. Upon George, with what was between them, and the ordeal before her, she could not lean.

Though he came as often as prison rules and her sense of discretion would permit, they were only little frozen calls within the hearing of some guard, unless they talked in careful undertones. Even when men in uniform were briefly absent there was

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the paralyzing possibility that they listened at some secret peep-hole. So neither spoke what was in the heart. On her side, the barrier of pride intensified by her position. With him, the chilling fear of adding to her heavy burden.

He was not at her side when the call to court came. The shock of emergence into a strange and roaring world was little softened by the companionship of a sad-faced prison matron whose lips seemed perpetually about to frame,—“Though your sins be as scarlet ——.” Leila summoned again the reserves of self-control. Even the gaping crowd that stared as if she were a strange animal, pressing with hands curved to tear aside her veil in the few steps between cab and court-house, she took as a manifestation of her *via dolorosa* leading—perhaps—to deliverance.

The court-room audience found her unsatisfactory. Unsatisfactory, because strange. A woman charged with murder who sat veiled; who neither wept nor shuddered; nor even clasped and unclasped nervous hands, robbed them of accustomed vicarious thrills. Women who had dropped in from shopping, or nothing in particular, called her “Brazen.” To male experts gravitating between court and poolroom she was a “Deep One.” Reporters quickly discovered her “Iron Nerve.” What the jury thought was determined later.

With,—“May it please the Court” the battle was on. In the matter of counsel the balance of per-

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sonality was with the defense. That was speedily evident. Both mentally and physically, Kent overcame the district-attorney in their passage-at-arms. His disadvantage established, the prosecutor steered clear of such encounters. For that matter, points of law were few indeed to wrangle over.

Matters went smoothly enough, as if money only, and not a human life were involved. Most of the state's witnesses told the truth, or seemed to do so, as they understood it. Carlin, and the maid whose careless tongue gave the police their clue of domestic discord, were unwilling witnesses for the prosecution. Sympathy with their mistress was evident, and they did her no material harm. For the maid only remembered hearing voices slightly raised as she passed the room in which Frank Slayton and his wife were dining. The purport of their conversation she could not tell. Trying to stimulate her imagination, the district attorney was squelched.

Policemen who came to the Slayton house the night of the murder were more obliging. That they would find ground for suspicion in Leila's bearing after the crime was to be expected. And when she was charged with its commission they retouched their impressions. For they were used to thinking the desired thought.

With but trifling cross-examination by the defense, the state presented its case rapidly. There was the established opportunity of the defendant to

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kill her husband. And who else had it? There was the revolver of the calibre with which he was slain, found in a drawer of her chiffonier. Who put it there? . . . And why had she refused any aid in running down her husband's murderer? Was it not fear of entanglement through a treacherous tongue? The state rested.

Witnesses for the defense were few. Members of the household testified they had never known of wrangling between Frank Slayton and his wife. Doctor Gordon took the stand to say that he thought her bearing after the murder in nowise suspicious. Only what might be expected of, and admired in, a person of superior mentality with unusual power of self-control. The prosecution did not shake him.

Without warning came the great moment for which the crowd waited.

“And now, Mrs. Slayton, will you kindly take the stand?”

At Mr. Kent's urbane request, as one person the spectators craned their necks. It was the first opportunity of many clearly to see her face. They took eager inventory as walking with the easy precision of one crossing her own drawing-room, she crossed those long yards between the counsel table and witness box, and stood facing friend and foe.

How curious the psychology of the crowd. It demands of the harried appropriate symptoms. No

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wave of sympathy went out to Leila, standing there with a firm front.

Direct examination was soon over. "The story of the evening, as you remember it, in your own way," Mr. Kent requested when the oath had been administered.

She told it simply, never glancing at the district attorney, who leaned far forward endeavoring to engage her eyes. How she was reading in her boudoir, not yet in the mood for bed. Yet she thought she had slept a little when suddenly she had the feeling, not easily described, of someone near by. Startled, she looked instinctively at the door leading into the hall. It seemed to her the knob turned a bit. She rose to investigate, and opened the door to darkness. And out of the darkness, as she stepped into the hall to test the switch, came a hand that sealed her lips with the stupefying chloroform. When she came to she sought help of her husband. And she found him dead. Only she was not sure of it at the time. She at once sent for the police, because a crime had been committed; and for the doctor, to determine her husband's injury. That was all.

"Your witness," Mr. Kent said to the district attorney.

"Now, Mrs. Slayton, is this *all* you can remember of what took place that evening?" the prosecutor inquired, approaching the witness stand as if to emphasize his question.

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"Yes," she answered.

"With time so precious, why did you not yourself summon aid on discovery of your husband's body, instead of sending for the butler to do it?"

The question was thrown at her abruptly. She answered promptly.

"I can only say I did what seemed to me the natural thing. Carlin had a telephone list. I myself would hardly know how to get a policeman quickly."

"I see." The district attorney pulled his mustache. "We must make allowance for your naïveté."

"Your Honor, I protest against such insinuations." Mr. Kent's voice was sharp with anger.

"The district attorney knows his comment was improper. He must not indulge in such observations again."

"I crave Your Honor's pardon."

The district attorney bowed, and shifted his ground.

"Do you think it possible for a normal adult,—a woman, we will say, of your age and apparent vigor, to be seized and held as you have described, without knowing something about her assailant?"

"I can only say it happened to me."

"And you don't know," the district attorney sneered, "whether the man was black or white?"

"He was white," she said quietly.

"And how do you know?"

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"My nose could tell me that."

"Very good." He pushed a sheaf of papers to one side. "Now, Mrs. Slayton, you have heard your butler's testimony that you quarrelled with your husband but a short time before the shooting."

"I object," Mr. Kent interjected. "There is nothing of that sort in the butler's evidence."

"Never mind," said the district attorney testily. "The maid, then. Both are servants in the house. You did quarrel with your husband, Mrs. Slayton, did you not?"

"A disagreement, not a 'quarrel,'" she corrected him.

"Very well. Let's call it a disagreement. At any rate, unpleasant words. What was it about?"

"I cannot answer that question."

"You must."

The district attorney raised a menacing forefinger. Almost instantly Mr. Kent was on his feet. But the judge anticipated his protest.

"It is my duty," he said paternally, "to instruct the defendant that she is not obliged to answer questions bearing upon the crime with which she stands charged. She will, however, realize that failure to do so may count against her."

"It's not that I'm afraid," Leila turned to the bench. "Only it is something I dislike to have bruited about. If it is put in this light I will say we disagreed about a woman."

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“Ah!” said the district attorney. “What woman?”

“I don’t think it fair to give her name.”

“You refuse?”

“I must do so.”

“Were you jealous of her?”

The district attorney took a few rapid steps, as if to add to his question the force of physical persuasion. Leila did not flinch.

“Not exactly,” she said.

“What was your feeling, then?”

“Simply that I did not care to have her in my house.”

“But he wanted her?”

“That was it.”

“Was George Slayton’s name mentioned in that quarrel?”

Leila flushed to her temples; with momentary hesitation she opened her lips to speak. But Mr. Kent was on his feet, thundering a protest.

“I object, Your Honor, to this unmanly and utterly malicious insinuation.”

The judge adjusted his glasses.

“Do you propose, Mr. District Attorney, to follow this question with any evidence?” he inquired.

“I withdraw the question, Your Honor,” the prosecutor said. “If my brother will bear with me in brief delay,” with a nod to Mr. Kent, “I would like to consult with my assistant.”

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“Be seated, Mrs. Slayton,” the judge observed, “while you wait.”

She sat pale and still as a statue. The rage of George, whose solicitude for her had been patent throughout the trial, was obvious. His clenched fists menaced the district attorney, as he stood almost within reach, stooped over the counsel table in whispered conversation with one of his juniors, who produced a small envelope from the despatch case before him.

“May it please the court, I have one more question to put to the defendant.”

Leila rose again. Her eyes more darkly blue met those of the district attorney, sauntering toward her with something triumphant in his elaborately careless air.

“Do you mind telling me,” he asked, “if you ever saw this before?”

She took from his hand a somewhat scorched and crumpled scrap of paper. For a moment her head was bent in inspection. As she straightened, returning the exhibit to his outstretched hand, her carriage was proud, not pitiful.

“I think so,” she said.

Her voice was low.

“And did you ever before have it in your possession?”

The same answer.

“I think so.”

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“May I see the paper?” Mr. Kent requested with manifest anxiety.

“It is offered as an exhibit,” the district attorney said, and turned again to Leila.

“Now what, if you remember, did you do with this paper when you had it before?”

“I thought I had burned it.”

“How did it come into your possession?”

“By mail.”

Again he handed the scrap of paper to her.

“Will you be kind enough to read what is legible?”

“I object,” snapped Mr. Kent.

The defendant did not avail herself of his protection. With every eye on her she forced her stiffened lips to read:

“DARLING:

“We can be alone to-day. I must see you ——”

“Who wrote it?” the district attorney demanded.

“I don’t know,” she said slowly.

He looked at her with feigned solicitude.

“Have you no explanation to give?”

Now impotent to protect, Mr. Kent solicitously stood near.

“This”—she slightly raised the note in her hand—“was one of the letters I received from some stranger. They were violent love letters, and un-

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signed. I didn't know what to do about them. Burning seemed the best thing."

"You never told your husband about them?"

"Never."

"Why not?" he asked sharply.

"He would not have understood."

The district attorney turned with a significant look to the panel.

"But you expect the jury to understand."

"I can only tell them the truth."

Taking the ominous bit of paper from her hand, the prosecutor returned to his table with a self-satisfied smile.

"Now, Mrs. Slayton," he pursued, "doesn't this note help to explain your misunderstanding with your husband?"

"It does not," she said evenly.

"Does it not help to explain the killing of Mr. Slayton?"

"Not to me."

"That is all."

With an air of indifference he sat down. Leila's lawyer asked a question or two of no avail, and desisted.

"If counsel have completed their evidence, we will take a recess of thirty minutes before hearing arguments," the judge announced, and disappeared into his chamber while the crier was still busy with his proclamation.

Even before that minute reporters scribbling

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furiously, and reporters with much physical ardor besieging telephone booths, were racing for editions with the long awaited sensation of the case. The hostile camps of prosecution and defense, one jubilant, the other grim in the shadow of great defeat, were busy in consultation. The speculative crowd, each fearing to leave a coveted seat, was busy with argument over the jury's prospective verdict. And the jury was somewhere smoking the fraternal pipe in a bailiff's care. Leila sat beside Mr. Kent, obviously much shaken by the state's surprise attack. After a word or two of attempted cheer, George hovered near, of all eyes defiant. In a sense not less evident because the attack was covertly made, he had been suggested as a motive for the killing of his brother.

How would this suggestion of a vile and secret motive for the murder of Frank Slayton affect the jury? It was an average panel, for the most part composed of honest, unimaginative men.

The drama of life and death came now to its third and last act. For the crowd, the forensic display. Mr. Kent for the defense was a sort of trip-hammer. The district attorney beat a tattoo. On one side an eloquent effort to overcome the blind force of circumstantial evidence. On the other, insistence that Leila Slayton, and she alone, had opportunity to kill her husband. And the motive for the crime the district attorney flourished in that charred note.

It was not the jury's duty, the prosecutor ob-

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served in closing, to be sympathetic. It was their obligation to be just. Just to the law, to the public they were sworn to serve. The same justice to rich and poor alike. To the defendant's beauty, and the exalted social position she had occupied, they must close their eyes. He demanded a verdict of guilty for the sanctity of the home.

The judge rose to deliver his charge. He was not an imposing high priest of justice. Constitutional mildness peering from somewhat baggy blue eyes remained uncured by the autocratic sway of the bench. "Equity" Brown—so his confreres called him—did not relish presiding over a murder trial. In his exposition of law he was painstaking, never severe. The jury felt in him a candid counsellor, a sympathetic friend.

"Take the case, gentlemen," he said in closing. "Consider it in its every phase. Consider it solemnly as if it were to be the last act of your life, and you knew it. And when you have arrived at that conclusion which to you seems just, declare your verdict in the fear of God, and without fear of man. Gentlemen, you may be seated."

Officers collected the exhibits of the case. And one bearing a tall stave led the file of jurors to their fateful consultation. As the door closed behind them a sigh of relaxation, of mournful anticipation, seemed to fill the room.

CHAPTER IV

THE PANEL CEREBRATES

FROM behind a smoke screen came the voice of Juror Isaac Hurwicz, asthmatic but firm : " Well, I think the same."

" Aw! "

The chair of Juror Joseph Glynn came down with a bang.

" You can't think. That's the trouble. You won't listen to reason."

" It ain't because you don't give him a chance, Joe," said Juror Freddy McNeil, with a chuckle, " you talk enough."

" You mean to say I hog the floor? "

Juror McNeil disarmed irritation with a deeper chuckle, and genial advice :

" Keep your shirt on, Joe, old boy."

Juror George Curtin grew plaintive, and slightly musical, as he chanted :

" Where do we go from here, boys—
Where do we go from here ——"

" Nowhere. Not a chance," growled Juror Frank Stellberger. " Another night in that blasted hotel. Cooped like poultry. And I have to sleep

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with Bill Carey. You're a wonder, Bill, with that snore like a freight engine with a hundred cars hitched on, working up-grade."

"I've got nothing on you at that," retorted Juror Carey, and ground his spearmint more vehemently. "You need a Maxim silencer in your sleep. Ever hear a factory exhaust pipe letting off steam, boys?"

Juror Stellberger's quest of a really crushing retort was interrupted by the turning key of the jury room door. Officer Corrigan stepped into the room.

"Well, boys," he inquired genially, "got a verdict for the court?"

"A fat chance!" Juror Samuel Carr commented disgustedly.

"I guess you can run me for representative from this ward next time," Juror Freddy McNeil observed.

"You're sticking to it well," said Officer Corrigan, with noble disregard of personal inconvenience. "It's about closing time. I guess I'd better take any messages you want to send before the telephone operator goes off duty."

"You know what to say," Foreman Bernard Stone suggested. "The same thing: 'Jury hung up. Can't tell when it will agree, if it ever does. Expect me when I come.'"

"Ditto," said Juror Carr.

"And that goes for me," added Juror Flynn.

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"Take it down the line," urged a fourth man.

Juror Isaac Hurwicz laboriously wrote a name and telephone number, and handed Officer Corrigan the slip of paper.

"Will you ask, please, is she well yet?"

"Sure," said the officer good-naturedly, and departed, locking the door.

"Anybody got a cigar?" asked Juror Curtin as members of the panel tilted back their chairs, once more prepared to give battle for justice. Only it appeared in the faces of several that they regarded members of the obstinate minority as nearly entitled to rating with the defendant.

"It's my fifth wedding anniversary to-night," said Juror Howard Hanson accusingly.

"I guess my company will have to get along without its president at the directors' quarterly meeting," grumbled Juror Solomon Finley, a wholesale fish dealer.

"I got nothing on my mind. But I'll bet my girl has on hers." Juror Freddy McNeil spoke merrily. "This'll be the second Tuesday I've failed to take her out."

"Let's go over the evidence just once more," urged Juror Flynn, who had small respect for the court's appointment of Juror Bernard Stone as foreman. "There must be something somebody don't understand."

"I guess there is," offered the irrepressible McNeil.

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“It’s just like this ——”

Juror Flynn was not to be lightly interrupted. He looked at his cigar, to make sure it was well lighted, and at his fellow jurors to compel attention as he resumed:

“I paid particular attention. And I can’t see but that the facts are plain. Is the woman guilty? Or ain’t she? We don’t have to bother about any co-respondents.”

“This isn’t a divorce case, you know,” Juror Clifford reminded him, as he lounged at ease, still keeping his eyes on some spot in the ceiling. His suggestion mildly offered was respectfully received.

“Thanks, Captain,” said Juror Flynn. “It’s another defendant I mean.”

“Now what are the facts? Here are some big bugs. Rolling in money. Old Jabez Slayton made ten millions in the steel business. My father worked for him when he was getting his start. And he was a tight-fisted boss.”

“What’s that got to do with the facts in this murder case?” asked Foreman Stone, briefly suggesting authority.

“Well, we’ve got to weigh folks’ character with the evidence,” Juror Flynn answered defiantly. “The judge told us to. Now, old Slayton has two sons,—Frank and George. Only he hasn’t got Frank any more. And if there’s anything in what people say,—and usually there is, it might better have happened the other way.”

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"Is this what you call listening to reason?" inquired Juror Carr, and fell to champing his cigar.

"Do you mean to say I'm foolish?" demanded Juror Flynn, thumping the table.

"No. You're the only man that thinks in this room. Tell me some more."

Juror Flynn complied.

"As I was saying, old Jabez Slayton had two sons, Frank and George. His wife died a long while ago. Before he ever thought of moving into the house with the lions out front, on the Avenue. She was a nice woman, they said. And Frank sort of favored her. . . . What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing." Juror Carr spat resignedly. "I can *look* tired if I want to, can't I?"

Juror Flynn snorted.

"As I was saying, when somebody interrupted me. Frank had some of Jabez's good qualities, too. A quiet, steady feller, with a head for business. Vice-president of the Slayton Company when he went into the army; and not thirty at that."

"George for me, every time," cut in Juror Freddy McNeil.

"What do *you* know about the Slayton family?"

Sarcasm saturated the voice of Juror Flynn.

"Well, anyway I don't fall back on Father." The zest of the born baiter twinkled in Juror McNeil's eyes. "We used to sell coal to the Slayton Company. I've been to their offices. Once or twice I

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got as far as the cellar and basement of their house. Ever there, Joe? ”

Juror Flynn drew a long breath.

“ As I was saying, what we got to do here is be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt. That’s what the judge said. He meant,—just be sure of the facts. And you can’t do that without making up your mind who’s lying. Stands to reason somebody is, with two sides to the case. You got to go back a piece to see what kind of stuff Jabez Slayton’s family was. To my way of thinkin’, it helps to show what might have tempted his wife to put Frank Slayton out of the way. Am I right? ”

“ I don’t see it,” observed Juror Carr.

“ I’m telling you,” explained Juror Flynn. “ Now here’s the woman in the case. You remember a lot about her in the papers when they got married. Leily Ransom her name was.”

“ Leila Ransom,” said Juror Clifford, never removing his hands from his pockets, or relaxing his steadfast inspection of the ceiling.

“ All right, Captain. ‘ Leila ’ it is. I recollect she was an English girl; nursing in a base hospital when Frank Slayton met her. Well fitted for such work, I’d say. She’s shown plenty of nerve in the court room.”

“ The district attorney roasted her for fair,” commented Juror Curtin. “ Of course, a murder trial is no tea party. But I’ve my opinion of him. The little beast.”

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“Maybe so.”

Juror Flynn passed on.

“But that’s neither here nor there. All we have to do is consider the facts in the case. Now there’s got to be a motive. People don’t kill for nothing. What did we find here?” He lifted a magisterial forefinger. . . . “She admitted on the stand that she had a row with her husband at dinner.”

“Just a minute.”

Juror Carr took a hand.

“She said there was no real trouble. And probably there wasn’t. Lots of people row a little at times. Don’t you ever disagree with your wife? It’s no crime.”

“Well,” Juror Flynn insisted, “it amounts to considerable when Frank Slayton gets a bullet in his brain an hour or two later.”

Juror Carr’s chair came down with a thump.

“Oh, what’s the use? If you’ve found a verdict for the jury, we might as well report now. It would have saved time to tell us a day or two ago.”

“Somebody’s got to do some thinking,” said Juror Flynn kindly. “To help those that don’t know how. Now let’s get back to the facts. Leily—‘Leily,’ I mean—marries Frank in London after the armistice. And they come back here to live. Frank goes back into the Slayton business, and settles down with his wife in old Jabez’s house.

“Now what? After a while George is discharged

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from the army, too. But he don't come back to the Slayton business. . . . Why not?"

"Say, Joe," Juror Carey inquired, "are you trying to convict George Slayton of this crime? Or are you just after his sister-in-law?"

"I thought you was asleep, Bill," retorted Juror Flynn. "Now I know it. I may say,—some ideas about this case I'm keeping to myself. All we have to do now"—he paused impressively—"is to say whether this woman shot her husband or not."

Foreman Stone rapped on the table with his knuckles.

"Can't we get back to the evidence?" he inquired.

Juror Flynn shifted his cigar to get a fresh grip on his narrative.

"Now both sides agree about considerable in the case. Jabez was at his club. And George seems to have a handy alibi. Who was in the house, then? Frank and his wife. . . . Most of the servants at a party. So they don't know anything about the murder. But the butler was there. And a maid that says she was in a room on the third floor sewing with the French girl that waits on Frank's wife. They may be honest when they say they don't know anything about the shooting. It's different with the butler. I think he's keeping something back."

"I suppose he ought to tell a story connecting

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George with the case somehow," sarcastically suggested Juror Carr.

Juror Flynn rolled on.

"Well, he took care not to know too much. Just as soon as he heard Frank and his wife jawing, he went off to polish some silver. And he never heard the shot? Why not? He wasn't more than fifty yards away, with a door or two between. How could he help hearing?"

"The murderer possibly used a Maxim silencer," suggested Juror Clifford.

"That's so, Captain," Juror Flynn admitted. "I hadn't thought of that. And the lawyers never mentioned it."

"They ain't so wise," said Juror Freddy McNeil.

"I'll say so," allowed Juror Flynn. "Now about this cock-and-bull story of how she was grabbed and chloroformed in the dark, quicker than you could say Jack Robinson. Didn't she give up easy?"

Juror Flynn looked about wisely.

"I'll say she did. Too darned easy. . . . She couldn't speak; she couldn't see; she couldn't move her hands. All done as slick as you please. Then she passed out of the picture. . . . What next? When it's time she comes to. Does she call for help? Oh, no. And why not? I ask you."

"Play fair, Joe." Juror Carey shifted his spearmint, and cleared his throat disapprovingly. "She says she didn't know then what had happened."

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“Have it your own way. But a woman’s first impulse is to holler when she is frightened. Everybody knows that. But it seems Frank Slayton’s wife is an exception. First, she takes a look around her own room. It seems all right. So, all calm and collected, she steps into—what do you call it?—the dressing-room between hers and her husband’s. And there he is on the floor. Having all her wits about her, she noticed he was turned on his left side.

“What now? Does she call for help? Not yet. She stoops to look him over. She sees blood. But she don’t scream. Nothing of the sort. She just goes to work on first aid remedies.

“It’s no go. She can’t revive him. But still she don’t call for help.” Juror Flynn raised his right hand impressively. “It may be the last minute to save his life. And she rings for an old, rheumatic butler, to tell him to get a doctor.”

“I don’t know what right you’ve got to say what was in her mind, and what wasn’t,” protested Juror Carr. “It’s our job to sift the evidence.”

“It is.” Juror Flynn bit off the end of a cigar decisively. “And we’ve got a right to put two and two together. Frank’s wife was pretty shrewd. But they always overlook something. . . . You remember the police asked her if she knew of any firearms in the house. And she said Frank had a revolver she saw once on his bureau.

“The police didn’t find one there. Who would

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expect to? . . . But where did they find it? In her bureau. She never thought they would look there."

Juror Clifford brought his eyes down from the ceiling to examine the militant Flynn with speculative interest.

"There's no proof," he observed, "that the revolver found belonged to either Mrs. Slayton or her husband."

"But it's a 38. The calibre Frank Slayton was shot with," Juror Flynn persisted. "And one cartridge had been exploded."

"But where's the motive for her to kill her husband?" asked Juror Curtin.

"Plain as the nose on your face. They quarrelled. What about? A man, or a woman. Or both. I've a notion George came into it somehow. And what happened? Rich folks usually rely on the divorce court in making a change of husband, or wife. But there's a shorter cut. And Frank Slayton's wife took it."

"You think George had com-promised her?" inquired Juror Max Schlesinger.

"'Com-promised,'" echoed Juror Hanson. "You mean compromised."

"I speak four languages." Juror Schlesinger flushed darkly. "How many do you speak?"

"One—straight," answered Juror Hanson.

"Time!" called Juror Freddy McNeil, examining his watch.

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“Opinions are well enough,” said Juror Carr. “But a woman’s life is at stake here. Suppose somebody put the revolver in her bureau, after shooting Slayton.”

“Suppose your grandmother.” Juror Flynn was scornful. “Would you expect her to say she put it there? What could she do but deny any knowledge of it? They took her by surprise. She never thought they’d poke through her bureau drawers. For once, the police showed shrewdness.

“Now there are the facts.” Juror Flynn tilted his chair back, and put his feet on the table, thus signifying his abandonment of the rostrum. “Can anybody deny them?”

“It looks pretty bad,” Juror Carr admitted. “But I can’t help feeling she is the victim of circumstances.”

“She seemed a nice lady to me.” Juror Isaac Hurwicz broke habitual silence with this mild observation, for a moment opening wider his habitually half-closed eyes.

Juror Flynn put both feet down—very emphatically.

“What are we trying here, anyway?” he demanded. “This is no civil service examination to see if Frank Slayton’s wife is a good woman for primary school-teacher. It’s a jury session to say whether this woman is guilty of murder. If she is—and I say she is,—we’ve got to return a verdict of guilty. Didn’t we swear to do

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our duty? We don't punish her. The law does that."

"Well," said Foreman Bernard Stone, "shall we take another ballot?"

"Might as well," observed Juror Freddy McNeil. "They won't let us play poker."

"How shall we vote this time?" Juror Curtin inquired. "Standing? Or use the cards again?"

"Better stick to the cards," said Juror Hanson. "It helps to pass the time."

"All right. You distribute and collect them," directed the foreman. "The rule we've had all the way through holds good. The two cards marked 'Guilty' and 'Innocent.' Put the one you want to vote in the hat, and hold on to the other."

Once more the fateful bits of pasteboard were carefully sorted, and distributed in twos. The jurors received them with gingerly care. And having made their choice they looked at it, again and again, lest some magic change the word it bore before they could register their vote. In such moments each held himself aloof, keeping his ballots face downward.

But the opinion of most members of the panel was well known to all. In the give and take of off-hand argument there had been little concealment. As the count proceeded interest was mainly in this question: "Had any of the minority come over?"

Foreman Bernard Stone adjusted his glasses, and cleared his throat. He cleared it again as he turned

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the last two ballots over, and added them to the larger heap.

"The vote," he announced, "stands nine for conviction, and three for acquittal."

A long breath bore testimony to the natural clemency of man. Then the voice of Juror Flynn rasped the silence:

"Who is it that can't understand the facts in the case?"

"Yes," said Juror Carey. "It's about time to come into the open and thrash the question out—man to man."

But pressing inquiry was prevented by the return of Officer Corrigan. Still smiling ruddily, he stood in the doorway.

"I sent your messages," he said, with a nod for jurors in general. "All but yours."

"No?"

Juror Hurwicz's voice had an appealing note.

"Couldn't put it through. The number you gave me was a pay station; and they said they had no messenger handy." Something in Juror Hurwicz's heavy face touched his sympathy. "Sorry," he added kindly, "that I couldn't wait."

"Now what about it?" His voice was brisk again. "Got a verdict for me?"

"No such luck," Juror Hanson assured him.

"Then I guess it's time to feed you."

"Make it the theatre, too," suggested the irrepressible McNeil.

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"No luxuries, boy." The officer grinned broadly. "Think of what you're costing the county. Wash up now. I'll be back in five minutes."

"I wonder where they'll take us to-night," mused Juror Curtin, trying to dry his expansive countenance on a paper towel.

"Cut out the Plaza idea," remarked Juror Carey. "We'll be trotted off to some near-by joint—as uncomfortable as possible. I think the court is getting tired of us, anyhow."

"It has nothing on me," said Juror McNeil.

An officer behind, and one before, they presently emerged from the elevator, and passed through dusky, silent corridors into the street. It was early evening, with the vanguard of movie patrons already afoot. Stares and audible conjectures were lavished upon them as they raggedly marched, two by two, with bailiffs bearing their staves of office guarding front and rear.

"I suppose they think we're Bolsheviki on the way to Ellis Island," said Juror Hanson disgustedly.

As they neared their destination a girl of twelve or so darted from the opposite curb to the side of Juror Hurwicz. Her appearance was so sudden, and her disappearance succeeding swiftly, other jurors only noted she was dark and thin.

"Your mamma?" he questioned, bending toward her.

"Is worse, Father."

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“The doctor. What does he say?”

“He won’t tell me, Father.”

A tear rolled down her cheek. And in the eyes of Juror Hurwicz the lamp of love was lighted suddenly.

“Father will be with you soon,” he said, patting her shoulder tenderly. “Go now.”

“What’s this?” Officer Corrigan came forward hastily. “You can’t speak to outsiders, you know.”

“My daughter,” said Juror Hurwicz simply.

“Oh! All right.” The officer was suddenly mollified. “That message you wanted to put through, I suppose.”

The party turned into a doorway beside the wide window of what had been a popular saloon and all-night café. The bar was still there, but no thronging patrons scraped its rail with urgent feet. . . . The jury climbed to the second floor, and entered a private dining-room. Juror Carey’s foreboding was justified. It was one of those dinners in which what should be hot is lukewarm, and what should be cold is clammy.

But most of the panel ate with the vigor of hearty and hungry men, save Juror Hurwicz, whose hooded eyes completed the puzzle of a mask-like face. And Juror Clifford, by common consent treated as a cut above his fellow jurors, surveyed them dispassionately in their hour of ease. Varying somewhat in age and financial circumstances,

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the composite incarnation of the middle-aged, middle-class American husband and father.

With this company "Tiger" Clifford, traveller, sportsman, and soldier, remembered in the Foreign Legion and in big game haunts of Asia and Africa, had been called to decide the fate of Leila Slayton. He had the air of a grand seignior. A sort of remote serenity other jurors liked. Sometimes he seemed to listen when his thoughts were far away.

"I suppose we're off for the night, Phil," suggested Juror Freddy McNeil, when a waiter brought toothpicks in a holder, with a dime reposing beside it as a delicate hint.

"Sorry to break your heart," Officer Corrigan replied. "But the judge said to take you back to the court-house."

"And him toasting his toes at home. Have a heart," protested McNeil.

"Well, I'm in the same boat," said the officer amiably. "Only there's this difference: You can go out when you want to. I've got to stay as long as you keep me."

"Oh, yes, we can get out," grunted Juror Flynn, jamming on his hat. "How can you let daylight into a blockhead?"

"There's the axe," suggested Juror Carey.

In silence they tramped back to the court-house. Never cheerful to the eye, now it frowned darkly, its portals closed. The guiding bailiff led on, through a basement door. They passed grimy en-

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gineers, charwomen on their knees, scrubbing the stone floors. At last they reached their room of weary deliberation, and heard the key turn once more, with Officer Corrigan's cheery counsel:

"Good-bye, boys. Be good."

"Now what are the facts of the case?" asked Juror Freddy McNeil, and followed the question with a mocking snore.

"You're a funny boy, Freddy," said Juror Carr gravely. "Only remember what's at stake."

"Say," suggested Juror Curtin, stuffing his pipe, "let's smoke a little while in peace."

"We came pretty near a verdict last time," remarked Juror Hanson.

Foreman Bernard Stone reflected, and decreed.

"It can't do any harm. You distribute and collect the ballots, Howard."

Once more the process of careful and renewed scrutiny. A closely guarded ballot placed in the serviceable hat; and a discarded ballot with equal care deposited face down on the table. . . . Again the foreman, first polishing his glasses, examined the bits of pasteboard. He was very deliberate, as if always verifying the verdict of first glance. As he put down the last ballot he looked about with eyes that questioned. Announcing the result, his voice trembled slightly.

"The vote is unanimous. All twelve are for conviction."

"But I want to say," Juror Carr hastened to

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stipulate, "that I vote 'Guilty' only on condition that the jury recommends mercy."

"I'm no butcher."

Juror Flynn spoke resentfully, considering himself addressed.

"Have it your own way about that."

"Yes. Nobody'll kick," assented Juror Carey.

Juror Isaac Hurwicz shifted uneasily in his chair.

"I think I make a mistake," he began deprecatingly.

"No, you didn't," interrupted Juror Flynn. "You voted right for the first time. Ring for the officer, Freddy."

"Some ice-water," said Juror McNeil as Officer Corrigan appeared in the doorway.

"Is it a joke?" asked the officer.

"No. We've got it at last," declared Juror Flynn. "Does that let us out to-night?"

"You've my permission. I got a house of my own. . . . I guess you'll get your discharge. The judge is in his room now. Fix up the paper while I tell him you're ready."

Foreman Bernard Stone adjusted his glasses. Then, with his duly shaken fountain-pen he began writing in the word "Guilty," with his signature as foreman.

Juror Isaac Hurwicz mopped his forehead, and took a fresh start:

"But I did not mean it."

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"It's too late to change your mind now," snapped Juror Flynn. "The judge has been notified."

"But ——" began Juror Hurwicz.

The door was opened, and opened wide, as if its swinging signified the jury's release.

"All right," said Officer Corrigan, and stepped off ahead. "Here, keep your place," he added.

With a ruddier complexion Juror Flynn fell back, and Foreman Stone headed the little procession, moving raggedly, and with a certain reluctance. They sank again into well-worn cushions of chairs vacated two days since, and awaited the court's coming. Free from avid loungers that thronged its sessions, the room seemed like the auditorium of a penitentiary. An appropriate audience chamber of the doomed, with its dim light and empty spaces.

A door opened, and the clerk of the court came to his desk, spare and spectacled. His whitened beard and parchment-like skin were bright under his shaded lamp. Now Leila entered, and took her chair. As through the trial, when not on the witness stand, she was heavily veiled. Looking steadily at a little purse in her hands, she sat quiet and motionless. Mr. Kent shifted in his chair uneasily, after a questioning look at the jury. For they bore their secret of sorrow with the perturbation of simple men.

"The Court!" a bailiff announced curtly.

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Another brass-buttoned retainer of justice preceded the judge through a swinging door by the bench. The assemblage rose as he entered. All but the defendant, who did not raise her head. Nervously the judge tarried a moment by the water pitcher, then settled in his chair. He saw the jury, the defendant, the lawyers, and court officers—all in their respective places. Drawing his robe closer about his shoulders, he nodded to the clerk to proceed.

“Mr. Foreman, and Gentlemen of the Jury,” said the clerk.

The panel stood at attention.

“The court understands that in the case of the State against Slayton you have found a verdict.”

“We have,” said Foreman Stone.

“Will you hand the report to the officer?”

Officer Corrigan received the paper from a hand that seemed reluctant to release it, and bore it to the clerk. That functionary examined it impassively, and presented it for the inspection of the judge. Again the clerk received it, and turned to Leila, sitting statue-like at the bar. As he addressed her his voice, for all its formality, was tinged with kindness.

“The defendant will please rise.”

She stood up very straight, and of her own volition faced her judges.

“Gentlemen of the Jury”—the clerk read evenly—“hearken unto your verdict. On your oath, you

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find the defendant guilty of the murder of Frank Slayton."

"With a recommendation of mercy," said Foreman Bernard Stone.

"So say you all?"

"We do," trailed into murmurs of assent.

Only Juror Hurwicz attempted more.

"I would say ——" he began in a low voice, and deprecatingly.

"Shut up!" admonished Juror Flynn, who stood beside him, in a hoarse whisper.

The judge looked at them inquiringly, sensing the slight disturbance, but hearing no words. As they stood silent, he frowned slightly, and turned his attention to Leila, who stood with clasped hands, like a woman of stone.

"The defendant may be seated," he directed, nervously adjusting his glasses. "Her attendance is dispensed with until ten o'clock to-morrow morning. At that time I will pronounce sentence."

With a sheriff on either side, and Mr. Kent, whose manner suggested the grief-stricken father more than a professional adviser, bringing up the rear, Leila walked quietly from the court-room.

On her departure the overwrought instinctively relaxed.

"You may be seated, gentlemen," said the judge, with a benevolent glance at the jury. "I desire to express my appreciation of your conscientious discharge of a painful duty. How repugnant it is to

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natural instinct I well know. . . . But what we might forgive as individuals, we cannot condone as representatives of the state. The service you have rendered, and mine yet undischarged, are required of us in the interest of law and order, without which society could not exist. . . . Be assured the recommendation accompanying your verdict will be carefully considered. You are discharged, gentlemen, from further attendance."

For the last time to their coat room, where Officer Corrigan, closing one door, opened another with the explicit direction, "Scat!"

There was little said as a grumpy elevator man carried them to the street floor. And they scattered silently at the door.

"There goes the Slayton jury," said a passer-by.

"Must have found a verdict," his companion surmised. "I wonder what it is."

"You 'wonder'?" The oracle's voice expressed pity, tinged with contempt. "Did you ever hear of a jury in a murder case bringing in a verdict of 'Guilty' against a good-looking skirt?"

CHAPTER V

THROUGH ABRAHAM HURWICZ

THE breath of a mild morning. And the city basked in the moist brightness. In the parks nursemaids were tender with policemen. And downtown, in the canyons of streets that admitted some beauty of the gracious sky, fruit vendors praised their wares with extra fervor, sometimes interpolating a lay of Napoli.

On worn steps of the criminal courts building lounged the morally dull and the physically unfit. Young lawyers with hawk-like faces ran nimbly in and out, clutching a thin brief-case as if it were their open sesame. . . . The politician was there, usually pot-bellied and sometimes silk-hatted, with the symbolic cigar shifting in his mouth. And for such gentry bond brokers, constables, heelers in general, ran errands to oblige the master's friends. The air was redolent of intrigue.

Within doors the fifth session was packed almost to suffocation. Bailiffs gave battle to later comers insistent upon standing room. . . . "Death? Or life imprisonment?" . . . The question was eagerly debated. But only the implacable, the idly adamant, forecasted the extreme penalty.

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Others recalled that "Equity" Brown, in his capacity as private citizen, had favored abolition of capital punishment.

So speculation was rife. Only the pigeons, primping in the sunshine as they roosted on the window-ledge, and the sob sisters and cynical young men of the press, busily writing their "human interest" stories for early evening editions, seemed unmoved by Leila Slayton's prospects.

The district attorney entered, fingering his waxed mustache, and sauntered to his chair with a certain complacency, as one that had won a victory. Entering a moment later, Mr. Kent brushed by him with the merest nod, and buried his face in the contents of a brief-case.

Beside the senior counsel for defense was a vacant chair. It had been occupied by the convicted woman during the trial. Would she still sit there? Or, being convicted, go to the dock? More food for speculation. A door opened, and she entered, —the ever-attentive police matron and a sheriff at her side. Without hesitation, neither shrinking nor conspicuously nerved to the ordeal, she walked to the counsel table, and took her place at Mr. Kent's side. He paused for a courteous salutation. And, seemingly, for a word of comfort; then went on with his examination of a paper.

"Gee! She's a stingy one," said a newspaper cartoonist resentful of Leila's veil. "If I had her looks, I'd never be convicted of murder," offered a

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petticoat reporter with liberal opinions and bobbed hair. "I thought she was stalling for mystery till she took the stand. Since then I've thought the proper defense was insanity. No woman in her right mind would throw away the advantage of good looks with a jury. With eyes like hers, I'd distance Theda Bara."

"The Court!" called an officer sharply.

The judge looked ill. Clear morning light emphasized dark shadows under his eyes, as he stooped for his customary glass of water. He settled himself in his chair, and looked at the prosecuting officer.

"I will hear you, Mr. District Attorney, on the question of sentence," he said.

The prosecutor came to his feet, straddling slightly, as was his wont.

"May it please the Court, the case speaks for itself. After fair trial the defendant stands convicted of murdering her husband. Needless for me to point out wherein such killing is morally more heinous than the slaughter of a stranger. The victim is struck down by one at whose hands he has a right to expect tenderness, love. The jury's recommendation of mercy seems to me more creditable to its heart than to its head. I must ask for the extreme penalty of the law."

The judge inclined his head to counsel for the defense.

"I will hear you now, Mr. Kent," he said.

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A stalwart figure, Leila's counsel stood for a moment in meditation. Then he put in an amazing plea:

"Your Honor, if the Court will so direct, I desire the presence of the jury sitting in this case, during my remarks."

Lawyers within hearing looked incredulous, as if doubting their ears.

"But the jury has been discharged," said the district attorney.

"The jury is here."

A flush of irritation came readily to the district attorney's cheek.

"Is this some trick?" he asked irascibly. Then, rising,—“May I inquire, Your Honor, what this means?”

"Only this, Mr. District Attorney." Tapping the bench with a pencil, the judge seemed in his turn annoyed. "At the request of the defense, I have had the members of the panel recalled for attendance at this morning's session. I have Mr. Kent's assurance that his reason is urgent."

"It seems to me," said the district attorney, "I should have been notified."

"I regret," the judge responded, "that you were not."

"Will the court issue the order?" inquired imperturbable Mr. Kent.

"Mr. Officer, bring in the jury," the judge directed.

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Once more they entered, the fateful twelve. On all faces wonder was written; and some mirrored resentment.

"We're probably stuck here for the rest of our lives," Juror Flynn grumbled sotto voce, with a sour look for mankind in general.

"Anyway, we got off for a night," whispered back the optimistic McNeil.

The jury watched with lively curiosity the unheard colloquy between Mr. Kent and the clerk of the courts. Presently the judge gave ear for a moment, and nodded his assent.

The district attorney half rose, but sank back into his chair as Mr. Kent turned away from the bench. His face expressed wonder, tintured with apprehension.

Glancing at a jury list in his hand, the clerk called a name:

"Isaac Hurwicz!"

Juror Isaac Hurwicz sat blinking.

"Isaac Hurwicz!"—the clerk called again, imperatively.

Urged by his companions, both right and left, Juror Hurwicz rose slowly.

"Bring him here," the judge commanded.

A bailiff's hand at his elbow, he crossed with the unhurried gait of a large animal the few yards between jury box and bench. For a full minute of suspense that seemed to those about him intolerably prolonged he stood there. And the heavy fix-

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ity of his face was unchanged as he held his slouch hat before him, fingering it with both hands.

“Is your name Isaac Hurwicz?”

The judge spoke sharply. Though the juror's mouth opened, no sound issued from it.

“What is your name?”

“Abraham Hurwicz—Isaac's brother.”

The words came thickly, with a supreme effort of will.

“Why did you impersonate him?”

No answer.

“Take him in custody,” the judge directed. “We will look into this later.”

Preceding a sheriff who pointed to a rear door, Abraham Hurwicz passed from the room a prisoner. And in his eyes, as he looked his last upon the scene of trial, was an expression that seemed reproach. With the closing of the door Mr. Kent again rose to address the court.

“Your Honor, we have proof of the truth of Abraham Hurwicz's admission. Isaac and Abraham were twins. Both were cabinet makers. And they lived in the same house, a tenement building. Isaac, a bachelor, as a boarder in Abraham's family. The name of Isaac was on the jury list. And he was drawn for service in the case now before the court. But, Your Honor, when the venire was issued Isaac was dead. To him, a few days previously, the great summons had come. What led Abraham, relying upon resemblance said to have

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puzzled even those well acquainted with both brothers, to impersonate Isaac here I am not at present prepared to state.”

As the counsel for the defense paused the district attorney came to his feet with a belligerent inquiry:

“Does my brother insinuate that the district attorney’s office had anything to do with the fraud?”

Mr. Kent smiled.

“My brother,” he said ironically, “is needlessly troubled. I had not thought of suspecting him, or any member of his staff. On the contrary, I am sure he will join me in asking that the jury’s verdict of ‘Guilty’ be set aside,—for the reason that a stranger participated in deliberations of the panel. And further, Your Honor, that a new trial be ordered.”

The district attorney did not at once respond. Pondering the situation, he tugged at his mustache nervously. With a look of displeasure the judge turned to Mr. Kent.

“There can be no question,” he observed, “of the justice of your request. Mr. Clerk, enter the order for a new trial.”

With “Yes, Your Honor,” the clerk turned to his docket.

The counsel for defense again addressed the court.

“Your Honor, I now ask that the defendant, Mrs. Slayton, be admitted to bail. She has been some months in custody. And the strain of that period,

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with the trial just ended, has been heavy. So heavy her health is impaired. We pray you, therefore, that she be released pending the trial ordered, with bond in such sum as the court directs."

"Is that agreeable to the state?" the judge inquired.

"I object," snapped the district attorney.

"On what ground?" pursued the court.

"I see no reason why this defendant should be accorded special privileges."

The judge flushed.

"I asked your view," he said with asperity, "as a district attorney. Not as an elder brother of the court."

"Bail is never accepted in murder cases."

"*'Seldom,'* Mr. District Attorney, is a better word than *'Never.'* The statute does not forbid. In the present case I shall exercise my discretion, and grant Mr. Kent's petition."

"But ——" began the district attorney.

"I do not care to hear you further. Can you furnish sureties in the sum of fifty thousand dollars, Mr. Kent?"

"Yes, Your Honor. We stand ready to furnish twice that sum, if desired."

"Fifty thousand, Mr. Clerk," the judge directed. "Enter the order. Court stands adjourned until two o'clock this afternoon."

With the crier's stentorian, "Hear ye!" still ringing through the court-room the judge picked up

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his papers and disappeared by a door behind the bench. Next the defendant passed swiftly from view, her counsel striding after her. The reporters vanished, with attendant artists and messenger boys, racing for their respective offices like whippets speeded to a mark. Only the district attorney was left, a discomfited leading actor.

The "I told you so" wiseacre had nothing to say, as the crowd jostled its way down the winding iron stairs.

"She's got a horseshoe all right," observed a scrubby-mustached man.

"How?" asked his elbowing intimate of the moment.

"'How'? Why, convicted of murder, got a new trial, and let out on bail—all in twenty-four hours. Can you beat it?"

"Well, it does seem pretty good luck."

Meantime the object of their felicitations sat in a detention room of the court-house, as rigid as when she had faced the district attorney's blasting attack.

"Come, my dear. You must relax," said Mr. Kent, patting her shoulder paternally.

"How can I?" A light fan snapped in her hand clenched with sudden passion. "It is all so indelible."

"Not 'indelible,'" he said. "We'll wipe the black mark out in the next trial. Now I want you to rest."

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"I'll try." Her voice was suddenly unsteady. And tears long denied came to her eyes. "You have been very good to me. Believe I am grateful."

"Yes, my dear. I understand. And here is Marie." With a man's fear of a scene he turned to the waiting maid. "Is the motor outside?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

As she answered she was busy, with loving touch smoothing Leila's hair and tying her veil.

"Then we'll go." Suiting action to speech, he opened a door revealing a spiral staircase. No word was spoken as they descended in single file.

"This way," he said when they reached the floor below, and led on through a dark corridor from which they stepped suddenly into the brightness of noon. Almost unnoticed, they gained the waiting car.

"I will telephone in a few days," the lawyer promised.

Closing the door with a courtly salutation, he turned away. With factory whistles signifying release to many that labored ringing in her ears, Leila began the long ride up-town. She, too, was released. But not acquitted. Society, which had petted her, held her still in the thrall of indictment for a monstrous crime.

CHAPTER VI

A FRUITLESS INTERVIEW

CAPTAIN CLIFFORD looked at the papers scattered about him with disdain. "Slayton!!" screamed every visible page.

"Poor girl," said the captain, and kicked the last sheet away. As the smoke of his cigar rose in a slow spiral his eyes followed it. But his thoughts were far away. . . . There was something ascetic in his expression. A short man and slight, with the flexible strength of fine steel. In moments of repose only the high-bridged nose carried a suggestion of command. And hooded eyes would sometimes—but rarely—open with a flash recalling his sobriquet—"Tiger."

A knock at the door broke in upon his meditation.

"What is it, Pat?" he asked, as a hearty Irish face appeared with the door's slight opening.

"Did you ring, Captain?"

"No, Pat."

The captain appeared to forget his servant's presence. From Patrick Hallahan's face it was evident he hoped for further speech. A garrulous, transparent, faithful soul. Butler, valet, and courier in one. He was even a chauffeur when Captain Clif-

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ford dwelt in haunts of civilization long enough to need a motor. Now he held his position at the door, marking his presence with a propitiatory cough.

"Patrick," said the captain.

"Yes, Captain," hopefully.

"I won't need you again to-night."

Disappointment written large gave way to natural amiability.

"Thank you, Captain. And I hope you rest well."

A moment's silence.

"Oh, Pat ——"

"Yes, Captain."

"If you happen to feel like riding in the park, and that pretty lady's maid on the floor below agrees it would be a pleasant thing to do, you may exercise the car. And what you need to spend may be charged in your repair bill."

"You're too good to me, Captain," declared Patrick fervidly. "They was saying down-stairs that you're a fine gentleman. It's well I know it. May you always have the best of luck, sir."

Departing effusively, Patrick neglected to close the door. The captain remedied his oversight, and stood gazing about his pleasant domain. Tweaking the dew-lap of a dignified moose, he took a carved cross of ivory from its open case and examined it with solicitude. Then he locked it in a mahogany box and strolled to the window.

Night was soft in the pleasant darkness of

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Gramercy Park. Something in the scene touched a spring of memory. He seemed to expand as he gazed. And his arms thrust out in a violent gesture, as if to widen open spaces.

“Out!”

He uttered the word as a shibboleth. With eager energy he possessed himself of hat and coat. And, stick in hand, turned to the door like one belated.

But the Captain Clifford who emerged two flights below was the captain his American friends knew. With the air of one whose promenade is eternity he strolled toward a club fixed in its down-town place by the founder's memory. The portrait of that tragedian who had found life a so painful mystery, and in spiritual adversity established an ever lustrous name magnetized the captain beyond most living men's society. Drawn by its fascination, once more he made slight obeisance and seated himself before it. Before those sad, imperious eyes he fell to dreaming.

Unwelcome the hearty hand on his shoulder, and the accompanying voice:

“Hullo, Clifford. Thinking of the jungle?”

“No,” he said, and turned to look at the accoster, whose eyes travelled in the embarrassment of unanticipated complication from the captain to his companion, a young man like himself dressed for the street.

“Do you know Captain Clifford, Slayton?” he asked with heightened color.

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"No." With undisguised interest George Slayton regarded the lounging figure before him. "But I am happy to meet him."

The captain rose with a courteous bow.

"We are going on," their introducer remarked. "See you soon, Clifford."

"Do you mind, Burr, if I stay to chat a bit with the captain? I wanted to meet him."

Slayton spoke abruptly.

"Sure, George. See you soon."

One Burr went his way in obvious confusion.

"We can talk here," the captain observed. "Though this club is apt to be too sociable for confidences. Why not come to my rooms? That is, if there's really something of special interest you want to say to me. It isn't far. Only the other side of the park."

"Thanks. Let's do that."

"A pretty evening," said the captain, as they stepped into the open air.

"You must think me queer."

Slayton swung his stick nervously.

"Not at all," the captain assured him. "You want to see me about something. And providence provides the opportunity. What more natural than to avail yourself of it? Perfectly natural, and quite right."

With little commonplaces they crossed the square, and climbed the stairs to the captain's rooms.

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“A moment, please,” said the captain, reaching for a switch. “There.” As light flooded the room, he pushed a leather chair a little nearer the table, and turned to his guest at the threshold with a gesture of invitation.

Slayton stepped in with a glance that involuntarily inventoried the scene. “Pleasant rooms you have here.”

“Simple, and quiet. I like them because I’ve had them so long. They make one of the few stable attachments of my wandering life.”

“No doubt about the wandering. It’s a great lot of trophies.” Slayton set tentative foot on a leopard skin that seemed still to hold the potential snarl of life. “Where do you keep the bear, tiger and lion skins; elephant tusks, et cetera, you couldn’t get in here?”

The captain smiled.

“Oh, I have a few in friends’ houses. And I gave some to museums. Take a look around, if such things amuse you.”

“Thanks.” Slayton promptly availed himself of the invitation. “I’ve shot a good bit in this country.”

“That’s a bond,” said the captain cordially. As Slayton moved about fingering some firearm, appraising the spread of antlers, or testing the texture of a flossy skin, his host studied him with half-closed eyes. He was twenty-five, or so, and tall and strong. His face was one by nature meant to smile.

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But care had darkened his eyes of blue. And lines of bitter tension marked the corners of his mouth.

"Looks overstrained," the captain mentally noted. "And likely to break down."

Not turning, Slayton seemed to feel his scrutiny. When he next spoke, try as he would, his voice betrayed nervous strain.

"Perhaps you can answer a question for me."

"I trust so," said the captain politely.

"It's about—our case."

A painful pause punctuated the statement.

The captain showed no surprise.

"Much as it would delight me," he observed, "to think this first visit due to myself alone, I supposed there must be another reason. Sit down, won't you? And have a cigar. That's better. Now what can I tell you?"

Slayton drove straight to the point, his eyes on the captain's face.

"Leila's lawyer tells me you had something to do with exposing that bogus juror. Was 'Hurwicz' the name?"

"Yes," said the captain. "Hurwicz was the name. It happened in a singular way that I was able to be of service. For that matter, my sitting as a juror in the case was a queer turn of chance. Do you mind if I go back a bit?"

"Not the least." But Slayton looked disappointed.

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The captain pulled more strongly at his cigar, and comfortably crossed his feet.

“Picture me strolling placidly to my agent’s office. And abruptly a heavy hand on my shoulder. I am in the clutch of a large policeman, who regards me sternly. What wrong have I done? Spoken ill of the excellent Harding? Or carried a flask from my apartment to the club?

“‘What is your name?’ he demands.

“‘Thomas Clifford,’ I answer meekly.

“‘Are you a citizen?’

“‘I suppose so,’ I reply, never having, as they say, abjured my allegiance.

“‘Ever convicted of any crime?’ he continues.

“‘No,’ I answer without the slightest hesitation.

“‘Come with me.’

“‘Am I not entitled to counsel?’ I ask, being already under way, and vigorously persuaded. A grunt was his only answer. A little ju-jitsu would have sufficed. But one doesn’t relish fighting with a policeman before a crowd of hucksters and curb brokers.

“Not to report the thing too literally,—by more grunts, monosyllables, and slightly more extravagant expressions, my captor acquainted me with the fact that I had been taken as a possible juror. A list had been exhausted, and officers sent out to pick up a fresh supply. When he mentioned the name ‘Slayton’ I said to myself—Pray, pardon the expression,—‘Here is an adventure.’

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B. "I had read of the case, and its circumstances interested me. There is something in Mrs. Slayton's face like one long ago I knew. A woman of rare poise, Slayton."

Slayton nodded, but did not answer.

"The singularity of my connection is complete," the captain pursued, "in the fact that neither side challenged me as a juror."

"I wonder at your willingness to serve," said Slayton.

"Naturally. Well, it seemed somehow an opportunity of service—I am quite superstitious about such impressions. And I am very curious concerning the operations of human nature."

"That's one way of looking at it. But"—Slayton paused for a moment's undisguised examination of the captain's face, "you are one of the twelve men who voted to send Leila to the electric chair."

The captain turned his eyes from the stuffed state of a Siberian tiger to meet the gaze of his inquisitor.

"Of course, that is something you cannot understand. And yet it is simple enough. As you will see. Now that the trial is over, I have not the least objection to disclosing what happened in the jury room. On the contrary, I welcome the opportunity to explain myself.

"As you know, the jury wrangled the better part of two days. I kept my finger on its pulse. And in the closing hours of the trial, even before the

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first hour in the jury room, it was evident that a majority were strongly in favor of conviction. They were rather led by a fellow named Flynn. He had powerful lungs, and the mind of a child, with this difference: The mind of a child is open to appeal. But the mind of an opinionated adult is cased in prejudice.

"Flynn distrusted me at first. I overheard his anticipation I would be 'stuck-up.' So I played him with what tact I possessed, and won his goodwill. But I could not shake his conviction of Mrs. Slayton's guilt. With the majority behind him, it seemed the part of wisdom to lie low, taking care to keep a few votes for acquittal. A disagreement would give the defense a second chance, with the advantage of knowing the state's case."

"Very interesting," conceded Slayton, as the captain reached for a cigarette. "But I don't follow it to the end. The jury brought in a verdict of guilty."

The captain nodded, with a gesture of deprecation.

"I must plead guilty to miscalculation. Throughout, the voting was a pretty open proceeding, though supposedly secret after they swung from verbal declaration to printed ballots. In later stages the vote was steadily nine for conviction to three for acquittal. That is, up to the last disastrous poll.

"I had no doubt that Carr, an amiable, middle-

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aged muddler, and the man Hurwicz were my associates of the minority. Carr, because he was a sentimentalist, and thought Flynn tried to bully him. Hurwicz, because he seemed fortified in stolid belief that Mrs. Slayton was innocent.

“So it went unchanged until the last night, and the last ballot. Then it occurred to me to change the monotonous nine to three, just for one ballot, and revive interest in deliberations that had degenerated into dull and rather sour personalities. I could swing back to the minority the next time. For no other juror would know whose vote was changed.

“Imagine my surprise when the foreman announced twelve votes for conviction. Carr had succumbed to pressure at last, with a stipulation that mercy be recommended. Hurwicz amazed me more. I had thought him immovable. Truth to tell, I think he meant to keep on voting ‘Not Guilty,’ but cast a vote for conviction by mistake. He started a statement, seemingly to that effect, and was squelched by Flynn. Then they rushed the vote out to the judge post-haste. Now do you see how the verdict came about?”

Slayton regarded him a little coldly.

“You make the process plain enough,” he said after a slight pause. “But I don’t quite understand how, believing in Mrs. Slayton’s innocence, and knowing her life to be at stake, you could take the risk you did in reversing your vote.”

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The captain winced.

"It was wrong," he admitted frankly. "In purely personal affairs I have taken great risks; and doubtless shall again. One's self he knows, and may depend upon. But it is wrong to gamble with the chances of another."

Slayton nodded, but withheld comment. He was examining the carving of an ivory horseman, and asked his next question without looking up.

"Do you mind telling me how you learned Hurwicz was an impostor?"

"Personally, I'd be glad to tell you. But certain considerations not of my making forbid me to do so at present. But this I will say. Mr. Kent has my promise of full explanation at some later date, if he thinks it vital to Mrs. Slayton's interests. Will that content you?"

Slayton reached for his gloves on the table beside him.

"Well," he observed without asperity, "you know best. Thanks for what you have told me. And forgive me, please, for coming as a sort of inquisitor to your rooms."

"Nonsense."

The captain rose with a gesture of hospitable entreaty. "And don't go yet. Now the question is off your mind, stay for pure sociability, and a glass of Madeira. It's really prime."

"Not a doubt of it, and you're very kind." A

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smile momentarily erased Slayton's expression of settled gravity. "But I must be getting on."

"Sorry. If I may ask, what'll you be up to in the near future?"

"Just one thing."

Slayton's jaw stiffened, and for a moment his eyes shone with the icy glitter old Jabez's enemies knew.

"It's my job to find the man whose conviction will set Leila free."

The captain extended a hand strongly grasped.

"Good luck to you. And where may I reach you, if it happens I have a suggestion to make?"

"The Racquet Club is the best address."

"You're not staying at your father's house?"

"No. I thought it best not to, under the circumstances." Flushing slightly, Slayton added—"Leila will be there. And you know some rotten insinuations came from that rat of a district attorney during the trial."

The captain nodded.

"You're quite right. And let me give you some advice, Slayton. Try to let down a bit. You look overstrained."

"Thanks. I do feel a bit wobbly at times."

"Better relax all you can. Let me be your doctor. I prescribe the Army and Navy game to-morrow. Won't you come with me?"

"You're extremely kind," Slayton responded after a moment's hesitation. "But I'm not in the

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mood just now. And I never fancied the rôle of kill-joy."

"Done," said the captain. "You had no engagement for the afternoon. Now you have one with me. I have two seats in Admiral Wheeler's box. Quinine on the waters; or, rather, in the swamp. I gave him some once in an African camp. What do you say to an early start? There'll be pretty girls, I suppose. According to the newspapers, no other kind ever attend a college football game. And there's the navy goat, you know, and the army mule, not to mention the admirals, with other institutions."

Slayton's face still registered indecision.

"Suppose you lunch early with me, and here," the captain went on. "Say twelve-thirty."

"But I wish you'd lunch with me," Slayton protested.

"Not this time. After some cobwebs are cleared away. You owe me a fair start for this evening."

"As you wish, then. Good-bye."

Slayton picked his way down heavily shadowed stairs with a puzzled look. Closing the door after him, the captain poured himself a glass of Madeira with precise care, and seated himself with *Beaude-
laire*.

"Poor fellow," he murmured as he turned the leaves. "It's a pity."

CHAPTER VII

THE GAGE IS GIVEN

THE Slayton lions yawned in the morning sunlight. They had no concern with the sorrow of old Jabez's daughter-in-law,—the widow, and alleged slayer of his son.

Within the mansion Leila Slayton woke, for the first time in months at home. She woke, and stared at the rich appointments of her chamber, for the moment bewildered. With those months in prison iron bars and deep dinginess had come to be fixed realities. And freedom, comfort—but teasing dreams.

In the night just past, memory of some prisoner's frenzied scream had brought to piercing climax a feverish dream. She had wakened, with ears instinctively alert for the booming voice of a great clock that in the prison world spaced dark hours.

Then, feeling silken coverlet instead of coarse woolen blanket, with a shuddering sigh of relief she had relaxed on her pillow. And after a time slept again. So the morning came, with that accession of strength that in youth follows even the darkest night.

Tentatively, somewhat doubtful even of her im-

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pression, she pressed a button at her bedside. And presently Marie appeared, her eyes of brown mirrors of solicitude. Reassured by her first look, she came swiftly forward and, kneeling, kissed her mistress's hand.

"You are glad to have me back, Marie?" said Leila with a little smile.

"Oh, Madame! It is so good."

Tears of joy fell upon Leila's hand.

"Don't cry, Marie."

Her own voice was unsteady.

"Forgive me, Madame. Shall I brush your hair before you have your chocolate?"

"I think you may. And bring me a mirror, please."

Gazing a moment, she put the glass down with a sigh.

"Am I much changed, Marie?" she asked presently.

"Only a little pale, Madame. And your hair so beautiful. Nothing," jealously, "can harm it."

With tender zeal she fell to brushing waves of lustrous gold that swept sculptural shoulders. But soon she suspended to gaze with adoring eyes.

"Madame is beautiful."

"Once I wished to be."

At the look of entreaty in Marie's revealing eyes sadness stamping Leila's face gave way to a wry smile.

"Forgive me for teasing you, Marie," she said,

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with a caressing touch. "Did you get the hair-dresser for me this morning?"

"Yes, Madame. Dora will be here at half-past ten."

"It's nearly that now. I will have breakfast here."

"Yes, Madame."

Marie turned to go, but paused at the door.

"What shall we do," she asked apologetically, "with the men from newspapers?"

"Reporters!" Leila put out her hand with a gesture of aversion. "Send them away."

"But they will not go, Madame."

"Then let them stay—on the steps. Tell Carlin I am not at home to anyone."

"Yes, Madame. But Mr. George telephones he will call."

Quick color dyed Leila's cheek, and almost as swiftly receded.

"That is different," she said. "It is his father's house, and I have no right to keep him out. Did he ask you to tell me, Marie?"

"Yes, Madame."

"And did he say when he would come?"

"After eleven."

"Breakfast at once, Marie."

It was unfinished when the hair-dresser was announced. And presently a maid ushered Dora in. She entered with effusive greeting. For Dora in her way was a personage, a privileged character.

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Her world, and she exercised proprietary feeling, was the society she served. She took unto herself triumphs of women upon whom she lavished her art of coiffure. And their adventures she deemed vicariously her own. To gossipy patrons she was a reporter of proceedings unchronicled by Town Topics or the daily press. She had seen two social generations bloom and wane. And each year her hair was seen more vividly red. On the assumption that institutions do not marry, it was maliciously asserted she supported a lover.

Dora advanced upon Mrs. Slayton with outstretched hands.

"My dear! Isn't it splendid? You know what I mean. I am so happy to have you again. It's been such a long time. But that's all over now."

"Not yet, Dora."

"But it's perfectly certain to be."

"I trust so. At any rate, I have you now. I am sorry it must be a short session this time. You know," with a little smile, "there's magic for tired heads, Dora, in your hands."

"They do say so."

Dora was busily preparing for labor. Conversation came to the fore again with the first deft strokes.

"I was thinking of you last night, Mrs. Slayton."

"You were?"

"Yes. When I was doing Nina Baxter's hair for the Sperry dance. Her hair isn't much like yours.

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Jet black, if ever I saw it. But her character reminds me so much of you."

A few moments of the artist's experimentation, and Dora resumed.

"Yes, I'm sure you must have been much the same. In your first season, didn't you think more of trees, and cows, and green fields than you did of men?"

Leila smiled.

"I lived very quietly, Dora, before I was married."

"That makes no difference, my dear. Men are men; the same everywhere."

A brief silence, and Leila closed her eyes in sheer delight of fingers tender as benedictions. But they opened again with the intensity of Dora's next observation.

"It's better to love God than a man, dear. He won't care if you lose your figure, and your hair grows thin."

"Is anything wrong, Dora?"

"No, dear. Thank you for asking. Those are just thoughts that may come to you when you are my age. Some women, though, are after men to their last days. Have you heard of old Mrs. Sibert's latest?"

Assuming interest, Dora plunged into the lively story of an old coquette's infatuation with a mercenary youth. And so on, with vivid handling of society's peccadillos. To Leila, relaxed in the spell

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of her hands, it was all no more than the light fall of surf on a distant shore. But presently she was conscious of Marie, who stood in the doorway behind her, and pointed significantly at a mantel clock about to strike eleven.

"I'm afraid I must let you go now," she said to Dora, answering Marie with her eyes. "It's good to have you again."

"Thanks, my dear."

Dora stepped aside to view her work with professional pride. Then added in a burst of enthusiasm:

"I'd so like to do your hair for a wedding. Your own, I mean."

"Dora!"

Leila's neck and brow were flooded with a crimson tide.

"That's beautiful color, my dear." Dora viewed her quite unperturbed. "Let me tell you few girls can blush that way now even in their first season. As for marrying"—Dora snapped the fastening of her case briskly—"what's the harm in that? 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.' I think that's a nice motto."

"You are incorrigible, Dora."

But Leila smiled.

"So they all say, dear. And I guess I always will be. It seems to me it's better to laugh than to cry. When will you be wanting me again?"

"Soon, Dora. I will telephone. Marie will go

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down with you now. And if there are any reporters at the door"—she hesitated a moment, then went on: "I suppose they are only earning their living. But don't talk with them, please. And don't let them come in."

"She's perfectly astonishing," gushed Dora as they went down the stairs. "After all she's been through. Enough to kill an ox, I say. And not a trace of it in her appearance."

"Madame is very nervous," began Marie. "But"—she rounded her observation with a heartfelt tribute: "Madame is very wonderful."

The hounds of the press had retreated for a while. But a man of thirty or thereabouts waited for Dora across the street. Watching them as they turned the corner together, George Slayton noted he was tall and athletic appearing, though carrying more weight than would be prescribed for one of his apparent years. He was dark and black-haired, with a heavy mustache that suggested a pair of scrubbing brushes.

"Who is that man?" Slayton asked as Marie returned from the door.

"That is Dora's husband, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, sir." Surprise tinged her voice. "She told me so. He has waited for her other times."

"What does he do, Marie?" He was feeling in his pockets for a match. "I mean, what does he do when he isn't waiting for Dora?"

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“His job?”

Uncertainty vanished from Marie's brow.

“Dora has told me he is a policeman without clothes.”

For a moment a quick smile made Slayton's face seem boyish again.

“You mean,” he corrected, “he is a plain-clothes man.”

“Oh, yes, sir. That is it.”

Marie smiled in her turn.

“What is his name, Marie?”

“I am sorry, sir. I do not know that.”

“But what is Dora's name?”

“Just ‘Dora,’ sir, is all the name I have heard.”

“I see. A true celebrity, like Lotta, or Napoleon.”

He found a match, and lighted a cigarette. From the floor above came the sound of a bell.

“Will you excuse me, sir? Madame is ringing. Shall I tell her you are here?”

“Yes, thank you, Marie.”

As the click of her heels sounded briskly on the stairs, he turned again to the window. With their fixed yawn, the lions crouched by the steps ignored passers-by. And Slayton was no more attentive. Unsmoked, his cigarette burned on, until he dropped it with a twinge of scorched fingers.

“I'm mooney this morning,” he confided to himself, as he picked the butt up gingerly, and carried it to the fireplace.

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His heart pounded, despite his effort to bring its beat down. And conversely the clock on the mantel seemed to tick ever more deliberately—retarding the flight of time. Twice he glanced at his watch, and replaced it impatiently.

Once he thought he heard her, and rose eagerly. But there was only silence on the stairs. Again he sank into his capacious chair, staring at the saturnine face of a Burmese idol.

What if she did not come? She had not promised to receive him.

“Why so dreamy?”

Her voice brought him to his feet. It was like contact with an electric spark. She stood in the doorway, its hangings of blue a perfect frame.

“Leila!” he said, then gazed in inarticulate longing.

Her eyes answered, as she stood there very still. Her glance searched his soul.

Something chained him to the spot, the while he saw, as one in hours of loneliness burnishes a precious memory, the face and figure that he loved. The short, proud nose; the eyes of unfathomable blue, with sweeping lashes. The shining glory that covered her small, proud head. And the mobile mouth once used to laughter.

His soul was in his eyes. And the message half-divine flashed to hers. Her hand came quickly to her heart, as the quick blood stained her cheek.

“Leila!” he said again, and no longer stayed

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impetuous feet. Another step, and his arms would close around her.

“ Please? ”

His arms fell, empty.

“ Don’t make it too hard for me.”

“ But you love me.”

In his voice, so charged with yearning, was a certain fierceness daring denial.

“ You forget I am your brother’s wife.”

“ You are not.”

He spoke violently.

“ His widow, then, if you will. And some say his murderer.”

“ For God’s sake, don’t, Leila. When I think of all you have suffered it breaks my heart. And I could do nothing to help you.”

He turned away to hide the tears in his eyes, and stared half-blind at the sunlit street. She put out her hand to touch his shoulder, but let it fall with a gesture of despair. She was very pale. And the hand hidden behind her clutched the portière for support. But her voice was still steady.

“ You must not reproach yourself. It was something I had to bear alone.”

“ But now we must work together for happiness.”

“ ‘ Happy ’? Shall I ever be happy again? ”

He swept on insistently.

“ You said that night you could never be happy without me. And I know you spoke the truth.

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You cannot deceive me, now I have held you in my arms."

Her eyes kindled a moment. But shadows returned. She looked past him, absorbed in some vision of a dark future. When she spoke again her voice was tender,—without hope.

"That was madness, dear. Madness for us both. And the fault was mine. I should have sent you away. Only I thought we might keep what was beautiful without taint."

"Honor," he said bitterly. "And what had my brother to do with honor? He stole you from me."

"What do you mean?"

Her voice sharpened.

"This I never told you before. A letter asking you to marry me was stolen by my brother's servant, acting under his orders, while I lay convalescing in his rooms in London."

"He couldn't have been so base as that."

Though her heart could not speak for him, something made her lips advocate of the dead.

"You say that? And you lived with him three years."

She flinched at his reproach, and he paused abruptly.

"Forgive me," he begged, and went on with quiet intensity.

"Let us be honest, Leila. You know you never loved him. That was impossible. You knew the Jekyll and Hyde of him. There were two Franks.

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The model young business man, the church warden, and political reformer. That one the world saw. Behind the scenes we knew his truer self,—disso-lute, and selfish to the core."

He opened his hands with a gesture of aver-sion.

"It is hard to speak so of one's dead brother. But it is the truth. He knew my feeling, and seem-ingly never cared. So we went on posing before the world as Jabez Slayton's properly affectionate sons. . . . What's the matter, Leila?"

She swayed, and clutched at the portière for support.

"I'm a little faint," she said, with an effort at a smile. "I think I must rest."

He was at her side instantly, his supporting arm about her. Unresisting, she permitted him to es-tablish and bolster her in a great chair.

"Shall I ring for some wine?" he asked anx-iously. "Or your maid?"

"Neither. I am steady again now. Go on."

"But I feel a brute. Hadn't I better finish an-other time?"

"There may not be another time, dear."

He took the blow, and mastered it, with deeper graving in sad chiselling about his mouth.

"That may be," he said quietly. "But I shall fight for happiness, our happiness, with all my strength. And no false notion of consideration for the dead shall close my mouth."

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Her eyes questioned, but she did not speak.

"You knew I cared for you, almost from the first glance. That to me the nurse was lost in the woman. But I never spoke, fearing to lose both. I did mean to tell you at last, that night I left the hospital. Frank prevented. He had come to take me to his London rooms. . . . I realize now he meant then to come between us. He managed that night to be always in the way. . . . But you must have known I cared, Leila."

"I had thought so. But you see, he asked me if you were flirtatious as usual. And how could I know what to believe?"

"He was clever." Bitterness again roughened Slayton's voice. "And thwarting me always gave him pleasure. Still, to give the devil his due, I believe he began then to care for you as much as one so self-centred could."

"He was very good to me," she said hesitantly—"for a while."

He winced. When he took up his story again the effort for composure strained his voice to metallic monotony that nowise deceived her ears.

"I left the hospital with the all-important thing unsaid. But I meant to write to you, to beg my fate, at the earliest opportunity. And I did,—the next day from London. I waited for your answer—day after day. It never came. And finally hope died."

"And I never knew."

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Her eyes were very dark with pity, and their common sorrow.

"It was too late," he went on, "when I learned the truth. The servant brought the letter to me in revenge for dismissal without a character, and told me why he had taken it. I was furious, and resolved on exposure of Frank's treachery. . . . But within the hour came a letter from my excellent brother announcing his engagement to you. Then I struggled with myself. Wondering what was best for you. . . . At last it seemed I must have been mistaken in thinking you cared for me. And so I was silent. But I have always wondered. And lately more than ever. If I had exposed the deceit, Leila, what would you have done?"

"I think you know—now."

The words came quietly from her lips.

"Then I was wrong. God knows my course was hard. But I thought it was demanded of me. . . . But one thing I could not do. I couldn't bear the thought of seeing you married to him. So I solicited an order that sent me into Germany. And I stayed there until I was mustered out."

He paused in bitter memory.

"Finally, I had to come back. I did my best. But it was no use. I could never think of you as his wife without aversion."

She turned away from his unconsciously accusing eyes with a gesture of protest.

"I hated him every hour. And the sight of you

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was pain. But the appearance of cordiality toward him had to be maintained. So I came sometimes, and loved you more. Then I found the answering fire in you. That day was a dazzling revelation."

"It was like a great wave to me," she said softly.

"After that I suffered more. But a bitterness in which there was something sweet. You understand?"

Her eyes voiced comprehension.

"I meant to go away without a declaration. Of course, I should have done so. But I failed."

"It was my fault, dear."

"Yours? No," he protested.

"But it was. Life had grown very dreary." She hesitated, picking her words with care. "I read your purpose. There are little signs a woman who cares cannot fail to see. And the thought of the future without you, life with a husband turned torturer, and a father-in-law who somehow always has frozen the blood in my veins,—filled me with dread. I thought if I could only have the memory of your arms, and the touch of your lips, it would help me to go on alone. Just once. And then I meant to send you away."

"And then," he said after a moment's silence, "it happened."

"The next night."

She shivered, though the room was filled with sunlight, and very warm.

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“And his last words to me were about you. It was after I refused to dine with his mistress. I had discovered the situation by accident. At a certain address she bore his name. And by error a letter meant for her was forwarded to me.

“He did not deny the affair, but said his conduct was no worse than mine with you. It was sheer malice. He did not know our little sin. He could not have known. But I did not answer him. Somehow I felt crushed by the accusation. And lest he see how a random shot went home, I left him. I never saw him alive again.”

Silence was heavy in the room.

“The rest everybody knows. Only,” with a sad little smile, “the jury would not believe me.”

“They shall believe you,” he declared, “and all the others. The mystery will be cleared up.”

“It must be, if we are ever to be together.”

“What do you mean?”

“I cannot marry with this cloud over me.”

“There are places,” he asserted, “where the Slayton case is unknown.”

“But no place where it may not be known. And be assured it would find us out. And the gossip, the cold shoulder, and innuendo would be like acid in the flesh. No fineness of feeling, my dear, can resist such experience. The bravest heart shrivels. . . . And so, you see, as matters are we must go our separate ways. I know the world too well to let you make a useless sacrifice.”

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“It may be you are right. But,” he persisted, “I do not fear the test.”

She still denied him, though her smile caressed.

“If the murderer is found. What then?” he pressed.

“What if I were the murderer?”

Something came between them, impalpable as a cloud.

“What if I did it, in a moment of passion,—for your sake and mine?”

“But you didn’t,” he cried. “You couldn’t.”

His clenched hands protested.

“But if I had?”

“It is unthinkable.”

“Now. But what of the future? When I am no longer wonderful to you, but only a woman judged as one must judge the companion closest in life. If we are to have true happiness together, there must be no doubts.”

“If you are afraid,” he declared, “I am not. But it shall be as you wish. And when you are cleared I shall claim your promise. Only give me a gage, something to hearten me in exile.”

Some Parma violets in a vase beside her gave perfume to the air. She took a few, and pressed them to her lips; then extended to him the cluster. Over his heart he tenderly tucked them away.

“When may I come again, Leila?”

“When you bring us deliverance.”

“You mean ——?”

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“That we must live in faith. Apart until this barrier, which is in our souls more than any command of man, is removed.”

“As you will,” he said.

He kissed her hand, and turned away. Her cheeks were wet as she watched from the window, following his determined stride until he turned the corner.

CHAPTER VIII

TRAIL OF THE BLACK RUBY

“PATRICK, did you telephone the garage to have the car here at half-past one?”

“Sure, Captain,” answered the beaming Hallahan.

“And you have the tickets for the game in your pocket, Patrick?”

“Yes, Captain.”

“You remember the tickets you left behind when we took a steamer in Naples?”

“’Twas strange.” With cloudy countenance Patrick shook his head. “But Captain, you managed those officers fine,” he said, and departed smiling.

“A good heart,” observed Captain Clifford meditatively, “and a poor head. Somehow, they seem to go together.”

“You wouldn’t argue that, though, would you?” asked Slayton.

“By no means. And anyway, I wouldn’t descend to analysis of human conduct immediately after luncheon. Consider it a sloppy remark. . . . Will you excuse me a moment while I telephone?”

Slayton heard him at the instrument, talking with habitual calm. Then sounds of opening and closing, as if drawers were searched.

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Presently appeared the captain, a little flushed.

"Excuse the delay and the racket," he begged. "I have been trying to locate my glass. That rascal, Patrick, has just had a clearing up spell."

"I might loan you this," said Slayton, reaching into a pocket.

"I didn't know you used one."

The captain turned the glass over in his hand.

"Quite right. I don't. It's one I found in the library the night Frank was killed."

The captain regarded it with more interest.

"But why," he asked, "did you not give it to the authorities?"

"I don't quite know. Except that they seemed only bent on convicting Leila. And I had a feeling that some time I would meet the man who left it."

The captain applied it to his right eye. Then the left one, and held it up to a strong light.

"I'm afraid," he said, "it wouldn't be of much use to me. The man who lost it has a curious eye."

As Slayton returned the monocle to his pocket they heard Patrick approaching. His head and shoulders appeared in the doorway, while the rest of him remained outside. It was his custom, for some reason known to himself. Or no reason at all.

"The auto-mobile is here, Captain," he announced, with a semi-military salute.

"And the gasoline, too?" asked the captain, stooping to fill his cigar case.

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"Sure, Captain," Patrick assured him promptly. Then qualified it with,—*"I'll see, Captain."*

"My eye-glass, Patrick. Have you seen it?" the captain called after him.

"Devil a bit, Captain."

He disappeared with indistinct reference to *"them gar-rage people."*

They found him beaming at the wheel. And presently they were on the way. All the world seemed like minded. The approaches to the Polo Grounds were streams of private motors and taxis. The elevated railroad disgorged its thousands; and surface cars groaned with the weight of humanity.

Many thousands were before Slayton and the captain. And thousands came after them, as they sat in a box glorious with insignia and gold lace. Admirals seemed as common as porters in the Pennsylvania terminal.

Slayton looked across the worn turf of the grid-iron, with its lines of white, over which young heroes in moleskin would struggle in advance and retreat, desperately bent on victory.

On one side the Army gray. On the other, the Navy blue. On both sides a dazzling profusion of charming girls, rejoicing in unwonted forbearance of Jupiter Pluvius. The seated multitude basked in amiable regard of the November sun.

The stage was set. But the cadet battalions had not arrived. West Point came first, preceded by

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its band, and followed by a decorated beast of sombre aspect, the Academy's famous mascot mule. Round the oval the battalion marched with perfect precision, and something no system can impart. It streamed from them, and touched the heart with the appeal of gallant youth.

"Aren't they splendid?"

Slayton turned to see in the eyes of a woman at his elbow tears of pride.

"Of course," she added, "I'm in the Navy. But I love the Army, too."

"They're fine boys," agreed Slayton. "And the best of it is, they're only average young Americans picked the country over."

She nodded, but said no more. Both turned again to the brilliant spectacle. The West Pointers halted before an empty section of the stands. For a half-minute they stood like figures of stone. Then a whistle blew. In an instant the battalion disintegrated. Its tumultuous units charged the seats with wild yells. Discipline done for the day. Down in front limber youths danced and pranced, and swung their arms, concluding with a gesture of frenzied appeal. Answered a thunderous outburst. West Point defied deep sea fighters in verse of blithe derision. And they chanted old songs of the service that made hearts of grizzled brigadiers beat faster.

A jubilant crash from the entrance to the north stands heralded Annapolis. With less pride

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in land formations, the middies sent their celebrated goat, blanketed and marked with a great golden "N," ahead. Not impeccable in ranks, they yet moved with irresistible élan.

In their turn breaking ranks, they swept into a reserved section with jubilant yells. They gave song for song, and cheer for cheer. Waves of sound met in enthusiastic discord. Bands blared on; and sometimes they were heard. There was much visiting between boxes,—the while happy outsiders viewed with equal favor the glories of full-dress uniform and apparel of the fair. And the sun sent into every corner its cheering influence.

A hoarse cry, the greatest, gave warning of the approach of the Navy eleven. Padded and blanketed, they loped through the north gate, and began limbering up. A punter's highly educated foot sent the pigskin spiralling far and high. Whereat active backs, clutching the ball with adhesive fingers, carried it fiercely back into the territory of an imaginary enemy. Brawny linesmen crouched and charged with all the abandon of battle. And coaches paced up and down the side-lines, appraising their pupils.

Another amazing outburst from iron throats heralded the West Point warriors. While the Navy team, with blankets drawn about their shoulders, gave keen attention from their benches, they also went through orthodox preliminaries. And experts gave special heed to one of their kickers, a lanky

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youth who raised his propelling foot to an almost incredible elevation, so that his legs suggested the widely opened blades of huge scissors. He kicked with the vigor of a hardy Arkansas mule.

Now the captains held converse, and a coin was flipped. Fussy officials appeared in sweaters and knickerbockers, thereby enhancing the effect of plumpness to which the superannuated athlete is often doomed. The pigskin poised for the kick-off, the referee raised his hand.

Above dying echoes of the Army cannon, traditional overture to service games, rose the signal of the whistle. The game was on. Outspeeding the straining Army ends, the ball nestled in the waiting arms of a Navy back, who ran and squirmed his way some twenty yards into West Point territory before he was tackled with such gusto that nervous beholders feared a display of fragments. But he only shook himself impatiently when a quarter-ton or so of eager flesh was removed.

Himself a tackle some years before, Slayton for the hour forgot all else in the interest of a hard-fought game. To the Army's superior kicking the Navy opposed a stronger offense. At the end of the third period neither side had scored. Several times the Navy had been within striking distance of a touch-down. But always the Army's defense had stiffened, and held. Once when it seemed conquered a last convulsive effort of charging Navy backs failed by inches. And once West Point partisans

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thought their prodigious punter had scored a goal from the field. But an official's gesture of dissent checked their cheers.

Shadows lengthened, and the sun retreated. Veterans of the game commenced occasional examination of their watches, estimating time left for play. The sands sifted to almost the last minute of the game. Then it came.

An exchange of kicks had left the ball in the Navy's territory, but near the centre of the field. It was in the Army's possession as experts recognized, with a thrill of astonishment, preparation for an attempt at goal from the field.

The Navy forwards charged fiercely. They broke through. But a second too late. Barely escaping eager finger-tips, the ball soared from the boot of the Army's star kicker in a great arc. It soared, and seemed to sail. Always it kept its true course. The mute thousands watched it clear the bar with a yard to spare.

Now West Point cohorts raved with joy, while the score board operator hung up,—“Army—3 . . . Navy—0.” And the Navy answered hopefully, with a stout heart. Another kick-off, and the warriors of Annapolis rushed the ball like demons. A slashing drive off tackle, and a fierce assault at left guard netted large gains.

Could they sustain the pace? Still forty yards to go. The Navy full-back retired behind the line of scrimmage. Was a second field goal to tie the

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score? As the ball was snapped the Army charged with all its energy. They broke through. But the ball was not there. The full-back had thrown a forward pass to the extreme right. It nestled in the arms of a lithe end.

In a second he was on his way to the last fateful chalk-line. One man alone in the Army back-field could hope to intercept him. A diving tackle checked him momentarily. But he shook off the clutching arms, and fell across the line, in the very shadow of the goal posts. A moment later he was lost to view in a moleskin avalanche. While legs still waved aloft the whistle signalled the end of play.

And the ball was across the line.

As one man the Navy exercised its iron throat. Not waiting for the official "Navy—6 . . . Army—3," the middies swarmed from their seats to bear their eleven aloft. Around the field they went in a wild snake-dance. And over the goal bar sailed a profusion of middies' headgear, tossed by wearers heedless of a prospective entry on the payroll: "Due U. S. for Q. M., \$8—Hats, 1, Dress, Blue."

"An amusing show," said Captain Clifford at Slayton's elbow, when the demonstration was near its extreme height.

"It stirs my pulse a little. And I've had a bully time. But I fear I haven't behaved well. I got

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carried away by the game, and forgot to be polite to anybody."

The captain smiled.

"Don't worry. Where pandemonium is a commonplace, silence is at a premium."

"That sounds like satire," said Slayton. "But I'll take it at face value."

"I always take compliments that way."

As they left the box the captain laid a lightly restraining hand on Slayton's arm.

"Where are you going now?" he asked. "May I drop you somewhere?"

"That's kind. But don't bother. If there's no taxi handy, I can get down-town on the L. Don't let me interfere with any engagement."

"I haven't any. Our host at the game invited me to dine with him, and go on to a naval ball at the Astor. But I said, 'No.' I'm too old to compete with middies for two minutes of a girl's society on the floor; and too young to enjoy talking away the hours with their chaperone in the corner."

"Why not dine with me at the Racquet?"

Slayton spoke impulsively, then added:

"That is, if you really have nothing else to do. I'll be delighted. But I fear I'm rather poor company nowadays."

"'Exceptions disallowed,'" quoted the captain. "I have nothing else to do. And I am happy to dine with you. Then I'd rather like to refresh my

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memory of the Racquet. I used to be a member, but haven't been there for years."

"My good luck," said Slayton. "Let's get under way."

They descended to the level of the amiable mob. Unanimously bent on dining, the crowd impressively demonstrated how each straining toward an exit might retard his fellows. It jostled and swayed, inching its way along. Women suffered, and men kept their balance with difficulty.

Slayton turned to behold with amusement the captain's silk hat, smooched and rakishly tilted over one eye. Then beside the captain he saw something that rivetted his eyes.

A ring on a woman's upraised hand. A ruby set with diamonds. And in the ruby, held as it was before his eyes, he noted a black speck near its base.

Had he wished to turn quickly, one way or the other, it would have been impossible,—he was wedged on both sides so tightly. As it was, he remained half-turned until his mind had registered ring and wearer with equal distinctness.

She did not note his interest, absorbed as she was in protection of her hat, broad-brimmed with roses no redder than color flaming over her cheek bones. A gypsy type, with flashing black eyes and somewhat obvious down marking the upper lip. She was rather tall, and strong, and

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young. And Slayton sensed in her something ravenous.

If she was unaware of Slayton's gaze, a man supporting her upraised arm was by no means oblivious. Meeting his fierce regard, Slayton had a supplementary shock. It was the man he had seen waiting outside his father's house for the hair-dresser, Dora. Her husband, Leila's maid supposed. The last proof of identity was the outstanding mustache, like a pair of scrubbing-brushes.

With a thrust of powerful shoulders the man freed an arm to grasp the girl's hand, and pull it down. Her angry,—“What do you mean?” and the captain's,—“Careful, you clumsy ass,” sent the red tide of anger rolling to his temples.

Not turning again on the way to the gate, since to do so would have been a confession of interest, Slayton felt sure the quartet kept their respective places. Several times a slight inclination of the head afforded a glimpse of the woman's wine-colored skirt. And he felt her escort's baleful eyes on his back.

As he emerged from the grounds they passed him suddenly. Afterward he was at a loss to understand how, in such a press, the manœuvre was possible. But the crowd, somehow persuaded, opened enough to let the man through, half-dragging the girl, and closed solidly after them.

His unusual height enabled Slayton to note they

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entered a taxi waiting at the curb. It must have been reserved. For as they reached the door the driver repelled a man bent on entering.

With a sudden determination to hold the pair Slayton shouldered his way forward. The cab was almost within reach when its driver saw a chance to manœuvre out of line. As he swung out the black-mustached man dropped the window for hasty words, with a gesture toward his pursuer. The driver nodded, and got under way with an explosive burst of speed.

"Fifty dollars if you catch it," said Slayton, pointing as he made the offer to the driver of the nearest metred machine.

"Engaged," said the chauffeur. But in the next breath he added,—"You're on."

In a jiffy they were away. And the chauffeur did his best. Within two minutes Slayton knew they had picked up the trail. For the black-mustached one put his head out of the cab for a look behind. But a moment later fortune played Slayton false. Stalled just ahead, a granite loaded truck constituted a barrier as impregnable as the Chinese wall. When at last it moved, under a barrage of irate police and the infuriated and delayed, Slayton's driver turned for his command.

Five minutes lost, and the trail. With only sight to guide him, broken contact was a stopper to pursuit. The man, the ring, and the girl might be

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speeding in any one of a dozen directions, to any one of a thousand places. Reluctantly, Slayton directed the driver to return to the Polo grounds. When he reached them, by a roundabout way, the crowd had thinned. And the captain, doubtless astonished, had vanished from the gate.

CHAPTER IX

AN UNFORTUNATE ESSAY IN CHIVALRY

SLAYTON was convinced. He had been over the situation, time and again. Always with the same result. The girl with the ruby ring knew Frank Slayton's murderer. Therefore he must find her; and find her without police help. If a plain-clothes officer were her lover, there might be influence in the department to shield the criminal. So he surmised.

Private detectives were available. A legion eager for cash, and nowise averse to taking a fall out of the police. But Slayton yearned to rescue Leila unassisted. There was but one person in whom, oddly enough, he felt he could confide. He would take counsel with the captain in the morning. Seemingly, he was nowise irritated by Slayton's abrupt desertion after the game.

"Don't try to explain now," he had said when Slayton reached him by telephone at his apartment. "And please don't apologize. I saw you had something urgent to do, and no time to waste. Only sorry, whatever it was, I couldn't be with you. I'm somewhat a specialist in the unexpected.

"Oh, no," he said a minute later, when Slayton inquired what time he might expect him to dine.

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"The fact is, I suppose I owe you an apology. I rather guessed you might not be back for hours, if you had luck in the chase. So I invited a chap I happened to meet to come down here, and dine with me. Better come, and make a third."

"You're tempting," Slayton replied, after a minute's hesitation. "But I've a thing or two to mull over. And I rather think I'd better thresh them out alone. . . . There is something I'd like your opinion on. Could you give me any time to-morrow?"

"Any time at all. After breakfast, if you please."

"About ten, then. Good-bye."

Slayton found the evening very long. Now that he had a clue, any delay seemed intolerable. He wanted to go forth at once. To find the dark man with the big mustache. And his companion. And to wring from them what they knew of the tragedy that made the dead man, his unloved brother, still an obstacle in his path, and a threat against his widow's life.

He looked at his watch, and returned it to its pocket impatiently. About eleven o'clock. And that portion of New York, or multitudinous invaders who give the American metropolis its superficial night coloring, seemed busily engaged in after-dinner celebration of the Army and Navy game. That many had nothing to do with either branch of the service was no handicap. Rather an incentive to

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enthusiasm. They were first partisans of food and drink.

On second thought, Slayton had preferred to dine at one of the caravansaries popular with those that delight in being overcharged. At his club he would have had either the strain of pretended unconcern, or oppressive kindness from some friend bent on exerting cheerful influence. Either a foe to reflection.

Now that he had reached a decision, and set a course, he was conscious of the loud volubility of the crowd about him. Its gabble fretted his nerves. Paying his check, he passed gratefully into the open air.

"Taxi, sir?" inquired the starter, with a whistle at his lips.

Cabs had no fascination with the night wind soft, and stars twinkling through the bright haze of city lights. With the first step for Leila's liberation just ahead, he felt in them a friendly gleam.

An unending stream of motors swept up Fifth Avenue. And the sidewalks were crowded with pedestrians moving up town or down, according to residence and devices of the heart.

Slayton turned toward Madison Avenue, seeking a quiet stroll. He was hardly clear of the crowd when a girl passed him, walking rapidly. Only a few steps ahead she stopped, and turned toward him.

"Oh, sir!" she said.

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In her voice he heard distress. And her face was terror-stricken. He noted its pallor, and the dilation of great dark eyes. A young girl and simple, with the dress and air of a bread-winner.

“What’s the matter?” he asked kindly.

“Those men ——”

She put a hand on his arm appealingly. Over his shoulder he followed her guiding eyes. A hundred yards or so back two men stood in a doorway. As Slayton looked they retired into the shadow.

“They followed me,” the girl explained, with a pathetic catching of breath.

“Well, they shan’t get you,” he said reassuringly. “Where do you live?”

“On West 96th.”

“Come along with me. I’ll get you a taxi.”

“If you please, I’d rather go in the subway.”

They were walking together, her hand on his arm.

“What’s the matter with a taxi?” he asked.

“I don’t like to accept such a favor from a stranger,” she said shyly. “And I’m not afraid in the subway—not with so many people.”

“As you wish,” he observed. “But such scruple is phenomenal.”

She did not answer. They walked in silence a few steps. Then she screamed.

“For Heaven’s sake!” he exclaimed. “What’s the matter?”

Again her piercing cry:

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“ Help! ”

She retreated to a doorway. And Slayton followed to reassure her. He put his hand on her shoulder, as she huddled on a step, shaken by sobs.

“ Be still,” he said soothingly. “ And tell me what is wrong.”

He was grasped and hurled backward, so violently that he reeled. As he recovered his balance a tall man faced him belligerently. And a second man leaned over the girl.

“ The two,”—flashed through Slayton’s mind.

“ What’s the matter, girlie? ” inquired her new protector.

“ Oh! ” she moaned. “ That man.”

“ What did he do? ” the tall man asked gruffly.

She straightened to tell her story. And Slayton again saw signs of distress—now intensified. The eyes full of tears, and a mark like a bruise on her cheek.

“ Tell us,” the tall man repeated.

Then she told a story, twisting her hands nervously. She seemed to strive for self-control.

“ I was frightened. Two men followed me. And he ”—pointing to Slayton, “ said he would see me home. . . . But he treated me awful. He dragged me in here. And he tore my waist. And ——” she burst into wild sobs.

“ See here,” said Slayton, trying to speak calmly, but unable to keep anger out of his voice. “ What sort of a put-up job is this? ”

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"You're a pretty bird," sneered the nearer man, and struck him in the mouth.

Combative instinct that made old Jabez Slayton feared in trade circles woke suddenly in his son. A smashing right, full on the jaw, and his assailant fell like a log. Then the second man sprang upon Slayton from behind and bore him to the ground. For several minutes they struggled furiously, neither ascendent, and neither able to rise. Meantime, the girl rent the air with her screams.

At length Slayton gained the upper hand. Astride his foe, he gripped his neck with unrelenting pressure, until the eyes staring up at him bulged with agony and fear.

"Enough?" asked Slayton, relaxing his hold a moment.

"Don't disable him, Alf," gasped the man under him.

Before he could grasp the import of this warning Slayton received a paralyzing blow on the back of his head. For a few minutes he lay stunned on the pavement, the while the girl gasped out her tale to the inevitable and fast growing crowd.

"He abused me! God knows I'm a good girl," were the first words Slayton heard as he struggled to his feet, still dazed.

"It's a damned lie," he said, addressing beholders in general.

"Better close your face. Unless you want to be

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strung up to a lamp-post," suggested one bystander. "See the condition the girl is in."

Her appearance was indeed piteous, with her disordered hair, the torn blouse showing a white shoulder. And her eyes were pools that overflowed on tear-stained cheeks. Near her mouth glowed darkly what seemed a brutal bruise. Slayton's eyes dwelt upon it. He had not noted it before, and wondered how it was produced.

"Where are the police?" irritably asked an elderly gentleman. "Can't somebody call an officer?"

"I guess we have authority enough," said the taller of Slayton's assailants, and unbuttoned his coat to show a shining badge.

"Plain-clothes man?" inquired the elderly citizen.

The man called "Alf" grunted, and pointed to a passing taxi.

"Stop that cab," he said.

As the driver wheeled up to the curb the younger of Slayton's enemies opened the cab door. And the other prodded him from behind, with a laconic order:

"Get in."

"I won't," said Slayton. "And I propose to find out," raising his voice to reach the crowd, "if a citizen of New York, going his way peaceably, has any protection against street walkers and thugs."

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The bystanders mumbled observations with a hostile sound.

"Save your speech for the judge," sneered Alf.

"Get in," urged the other, with a push toward the open door of the cab. "And be quick about it."

"By what authority ——" began Slayton, as both seized him by the shoulders.

"You're under arrest," Alf growled. "Now," drawing a night-stick, "will you go peaceable? Or do you want to be beaned?"

"You've got your way now," Slayton conceded, and stepped into the cab.

"Thirty-fifth Street station," said the smaller man to the driver.

In the short ride Slayton was perplexed, and still more excited. Forced into a small seat with his back to the chauffeur, he faced his captors. Alf, the big man, was florid and clean shaven, with pompadour hair and fierce gray eyes. The smaller, now addressed as "Frisky," was sandy-haired and sallow, with a sly look. His eyes were the eyes of a fox.

"What do you expect to get out of this?" he asked, interrupting a low-toned conversation.

"I can guess what you'll get," suggested "Frisky" with an evil smile.

"About six months at Blackwell's, if the judge is good natured," Alf supplemented.

So it was his imprisonment on a trumped up charge they were after, and not money. For what

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purpose? Slayton was positive he had never seen either of the men before. What profit to them if he were put behind bars? His aching head having no solution to offer, he contented himself with a defiant observation.

"I shall have something to say when we get before a court."

A hoarse chuckle was the only answer. The cab stopped abruptly, and the two men got out. As Slayton followed, responsive to a sign, he saw before him the melancholy entrance to a police station. The usual pale light, and the handful of guttersnipes hanging about with morbid interest in the night's catch.

Alf and "Frisky" took Slayton by the elbows, one on each side.

"I can walk without assistance," he said resentfully.

"But you're dangerous," observed Alf. "You might get away."

With tightened grip they shoved him before them, down a corridor and through swinging doors, to the desk where a stout sergeant, with uniform coat unbuttoned for relief from the heat, presided over the blotter. As Slayton was brought in a shock-headed little man disappeared in the hands of two burly policemen, his fervid protests stolidly ignored.

"Before God, I am innocent! I try to run straight. But the bulls won't give me a chance," he cried over his shoulder.

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The sergeant blinked unmoved. As the cell-room door closed with a bang he carefully blotted an entry, and reached for a handkerchief to mop his steaming brow. Then he looked up, with a casual salutation:

“Hello, Alf. Hullo, Frisky. What you brought in?”

“Aggravated assault,” Alf responded concisely, and pushed Slayton nearer his superior.

“Um,” said the sergeant, chewing his penholder. “What witnesses?”

“Frisky and me. We happened to be sloping just behind. Dead open-and-shut. Girl in the case will appear.”

“Seems to be all ship-shape,” the sergeant agreed. “What name?”

“Isn’t it about time,” interjected Slayton, with a sudden snapping of sorely tried patience, “for you to hear me?”

“All right, I will,” said the sergeant. “What’s your name?”

“My name is Slayton. And I want to know——”

He paused, bewildered by the sergeant’s guffaw.

“I suppose you’re some relation of the famous family on the Avenue,” that worthy suggested facetiously.

“I am Jabez Slayton’s son.”

“Yes, yes.” The sergeant spoke soothingly. “There’ll be a lot of them, until people get that

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murder case out of their heads. Just to distinguish you,—suppose we call you ‘Smith.’ ”

“I don’t care a damn what you call me.”

Slayton pounded the desk to emphasize the observation.

“My name is George Slayton. And I’m going to find out what’s behind this conspiracy to blacken my reputation.”

“Sure.” The sergeant still smiled. “Tell that to the judge. It’s my job to book you.”

“Then send for my lawyer,” Slayton demanded.

“In the morning,” the oracle of the desk assented. “Maybe then you’ll know who you are. Now”—writing a name in the blotter, “you’re ‘Smith. Joseph Smith.’ ”

“But I want to give bail.”

“See here!”

The sergeant’s urbanity was lost in a frown.

“Do you think we have nothing to do but talk to you all night? Look at yourself.”

Accepting the invitation, Slayton surveyed himself in a small mirror hung over the sergeant’s desk. He saw a man whose face was bruised and dirty. Blood had dried on a cut over the left eye. There was blood, too, on the linen collar. The breast pocket of his coat was torn, so that it hung loose. And there was a rip in the seam over the shoulder. With street dirt ground into his clothes, and smearing exposed portions of his body,—his appearance was disreputable. His silence confessed it.

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"Hell!" ejaculated the sergeant. "You a millionaire's son! Take him away, boys."

With alacrity Alf and "Frisky" obeyed. Quiet before the sergeant, in the cell room they gave rein to self-congratulation.

"This way, my beauty," said Alf with a vigorous shove. "We'll conduct you to a bridal suite."

"Tell me," urged Slayton as a cell door was opened. "What is the game? I'll make it worth while."

"Do you want to go up river for trying to bribe an officer?" asked Alf.

Slayton said no more. But he pondered overheard conversation of the two worthies, as they paused a moment around the corner near his cell.

"Sure he's the right one?" asked "Frisky."

"Pretty sure," said Alf. "When Fritz comes in we'll make certain."

Their footsteps echoed into silence, with the harsh grating of the great steel door. Then oppressive silence, charged with the suspense of unuttered fears.

In hours that followed Slayton experienced terrors of imagination in the first shock of contact with prison bars. They closed in, nearer and nearer, until they seemed to press upon his head. He had a feeling of horrible constriction. Unable to move, and hardly to breathe.

The air was foul with emanations of the physically impure. The bunk, on which in sheer weariness

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ness he had seated himself, was a breeding place for vermin. He felt its loathsome crawling upon his skin. Unreasoned sensation of something behind sent him in a bound to the cell door, to stand there, gripping the bars convulsively as he stared into the dimly lighted corridor, seeking some reassuring connection with familiar things.

“What you in for, matey?”

A hoarse voice from the darkness Slayton traced to the prisoner on his immediate right. By craning his neck he saw the outline of a face, like his own pressed against the bars.

“It’s a false arrest,” he answered briefly, hating to name the charge.

“Sure,” the unknown commented with a little laugh. “We all have that experience.”

Angered, Slayton was silent.

“Well,” said his unruffled neighbor, after a little pause, “I guess I’ll hit the hay. Hope you put it over. So long.”

In the uneasy silence that followed Slayton was acutely conscious of the sighs, the muttered curses, and the murmurs of uneasy sleepers. Grown drowsy, despite the dictate of his opposing will, he still sat on the side of the bunk, seeking the solution of his predicament. So sleep possessed him.

He slept, and dreamed of days on a far western range. Of wide, wind-swept spaces. Of air that quickened the blood like wine. Of slopes tawny in the sunshine. And nights when air from the

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hills came in cool puffs that eddied about the sleeper like elfish visitors. Then to the ears of dreamy consciousness came a thread of silver sound, like faint winding of the horn of some far-off huntsman. . . . Brief oblivion.

Slayton returned to reality with a shudder. Down the corridor some prisoner cried aloud; and cried again. Moans of despair succeeded, with oaths of prisoners resentful at being disturbed. Then a turnkey entered, with threats of punishment; and the disturbance gradually ceased.

Slayton strove to hold himself steady. To fortify himself for the ordeal of the morning. Again he slept, such was his fatigue.

The rattling of his cell door brought him up with a start. He awoke bewildered. What was the hour? From shadows in the corridor, poorly lighted at best, seemingly it was not morning.

"Come. Get a move on," growled Alf, whose voice he recognized before he saw his face. And "Frisky" peered from the background.

"What's the matter now?" he asked.

"Want to see you," said Alf.

"Well, here I am."

"None of your lip," Alf threatened in a fierce undertone. "Do you want to be fetched?"

"With the fine, even chance I have, I may as well oblige."

Wasted irony. The pair eyed him in sullen silence as he stepped from his cell.

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A foe on either side, he was conducted the length of the cell room, and through a little door. Here and there a face pressed to the bars. And eyes glazed or sympathetic followed his progress.

The room into which he was led was small and brightly lighted, a room plainly sheathed, with a little window that gave on a corridor in one end. Several chairs stood along the wall, and one in the centre of the room.

"Sit there."

Alf pointed to the chair in the middle of the floor.

"No, the other way," as Slayton, turning the chair, sat with his back to the window.

"What's the difference? Am I to be photographed?"

"Never mind about the idea. Do as you're told."

"Thanks for your courtesy." Slayton turned as ordered. "Now, what is it?"

"We just want to give you a little advice, friendly like." "Frisky" leered. "It'll go a lot easier with you, if you confess."

"Let me return the advice to you," Slayton retorted. "You'll need the kindness of some judge when I'm through with you."

"I've a good mind to send you up river," said Alf savagely.

Disdaining to reply, Slayton fixed his eyes on the little window. As he did so the face of a man peering in was hastily withdrawn. The moment sufficed for identification.

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No mistaking the scrubbing-brush mustache, the beetling brows, and fierce black eyes. It was the husband of the hair-dresser, Dora; the companion, and apparently her lover, of the girl wearing Leila's stolen ruby. Was he a party to the false arrest, with threat of imprisonment? What had seemed completely blind suddenly exhibited a possible motive.

At yesterday's game the man had noted his interest in the ring. And he had palpably run away afterward. If he planned and had executed the manufactured charge of which Slayton found himself the victim, and put it through within twenty-four hours, it was a display of celerity and shrewdness with which one would hardly have credited him. Assuming it was a police conspiracy he had to meet, Slayton resolved to say nothing until he had reached Mr. Kent.

"Well," observed Alf, "are you coming through with a statement?"

"You're wasting time. I'll say all I have to say to the court."

"I'd give him the ear," "Frisky" suggested.

The purport of this suggestion was immediately revealed. Standing behind him, Alf struck Slayton's left ear, pressing it forward with the open hand. The pain was excruciating.

Stung to ungovernable anger, Slayton turned swiftly, landing on the bully's neck as he rose. Alf drew his night-stick, with a guttural oath. But

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Slayton pinioned his hand. With "Frisky," whose previous encounter with Slayton bred caution, awaiting his companion's call for help, they struggled for mastery.

Crashes of upset chairs marked their encounter. Victory had not perched on either banner, though Slayton's adversary had an advantage in his ferocity and greater weight, when the door opened to admit a powerfully built officer who promptly intervened. Breaking Alf's grip with a twist productive of a snarl of pain, he pushed the antagonists apart.

"What are you trying to do?" He surveyed Alf with manifest disgust. "Sending a prisoner to the hospital? Or getting ready to take him into court?"

"He was too fresh," said Alf sullenly.

"Suppose he was. Is that an excuse for waking everybody in the station house?"

Alf did not reply. But "Frisky" ventured an observation.

"There's a special reason, Joe."

" 'Special reason!' "

The newcomer snorted his disgust.

"Be careful, Frisky, about overtaxing your head. You and Alf are always mussing up something."

Neither resented the disparaging observation. In some way the officer called "Joe" compelled deference.

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Alf turned to Slayton, with a surly, "Come along."

"Wait a minute," said Joe. "Which cell is he in?"

"No. 66," said Alf, grudgingly.

"All right. I'll lock him up."

"What are you buttin' in for, anyway?" Alf turned suddenly aggressive. "I guess I know enough to handle a prisoner."

"Well, you know what I know," Joe observed. "And I guess it's enough."

Alf wilted at the suggestion. Mumbling something not understood, he turned to the door. And after him went "Frisky," likewise speechless, with blinking eyes.

"Huh!" Joe ejaculated, and turned to Slayton. "Come along, young feller. But say," as Slayton rose to accompany him, "you look pretty well down and out. I guess Alf and Frisky haven't been extra pleasant to you."

With a sardonic smile he took in traces of the night's engagement in street and station house. Then he winked broadly.

"How'd you like a drink of—er—ginger ale?"

"A drink of anything," Slayton answered promptly.

"All right. Wait a minute while I do some scouting."

He departed, with a rolling gait suggesting life at sea. No lock was turned. Not even the door

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closed. But the idea of attempted escape did not enter Slayton's mind. He had wanted to find the hair-dresser's reputed husband. Instead, the man had found him, and proposed to hold him helpless in jail. Desperate as his situation seemed, it held the brightening hope of a clue to his brother's murderer. At the proper time he would make his fight in court. He had no desire to run away.

Presently his Samaritan returned, with a tall glassful of familiar hue.

"Down that," he said, offering the glass to Slayton. "It's got a little kick in it."

Unquestionably ginger ale, with a slightly sweet flavor Slayton could not identify. He drank it gratefully, and without question.

"Now for bed," said the officer.

Again Slayton followed down the double row, between grated openings in the whitewashed wall. The door to cell 66 was open, and he stepped quickly in. The door closed; the bolt rang.

"So long," said the officer in friendly fashion. "Get what beauty sleep you can."

His footsteps died away as Slayton seated himself on the bunk with a feeling of relief. At least, troubles of the night were over. And it was very late. He must get as much sleep as possible, to prepare for the battle in court. Swinging round in the bunk, he relaxed in a posture of slumber. It came quick and deep. In the hours that precede dawn distressful sounds of night in a prison are intensified. But Slayton did not hear them.

CHAPTER X

OFFICERS AND OUTCASTS

“TURN out. What’s the matter with you?”

The question, emphasized with slaps and vigorous shaking, elicited from Slayton only a dazed stare.

“What?” he asked confusedly, as a rough hand on his collar pulled him up to a sitting posture.

“Turn out,” the turnkey reiterated irritably. “It’s almost time to go to court. Why didn’t you get up with the other boys?”

“I guess I was asleep,” said Slayton, still muddled.

“That’s your lookout. If you’d rather snooze than get your breakfast, it’s no concern of mine. You had your call like the others. Mind, now, you don’t go to sleep again.”

Not bothering to lock the door, he went strolling down the corridor. Following his progress, as he stood at the grating and labored to clarify thought, Slayton saw other prisoners were astir.

They shuffled up and down. The sharper, and the drunkard; the ferret-faced, and the bleary-eyed. A few still capable of shame held slightly aloof. But to the great majority the occasion was not with-

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out social charm. They compared charges against themselves, as women about a tea-table dwell upon their respective lists of ailments.

Some paused to gaze with languid interest at Slayton, as he sat with bowed head, bracing for the ordeal ahead. While no food had passed his lips since early dinner the day before, and the night's aggregate of sleep was indeed small, these influences were not responsible for physical and mental languor that made the slightest exertion, the simplest thought, an enormous effort.

In painful cogitation he enlarged by one the circle of his enemies. There must have been a drug in the sweetish ginger ale brought by the friendly appearing policeman called "Joe."

How many were concerned in conspiracy to put him out of the way? Four,—seemingly. With two happenings. And the cause, his observation of the girl with what he took to be Leila's ring, was less than twenty-four hours old. If the police were sometimes slack in protection of the public, they were no laggards in looking out for themselves.

What next? Would George Slayton disappear as "Joseph Smith," arrested on a trumped-up charge, booked under a false name, and drugged to get him before the court in a helpless condition? The Slayton will returned a vigorous negative. As George raised his head, with a determined squaring of his shoulders, he heard the turnkey calling:

"Get a hustle on. Come along now."

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There was a general movement without. And mindful of his warning, he joined it. By twos and threes the night's grist of prisoners straggled along, to motor vans waiting to carry them to a magistrate's court.

Seemingly these veterans proceeding with sangfroid did not consider Slayton an exceptional companion. It was not strange. For the dirt and disorder of last night's encounter were supplemented by his unshaven condition, and lack of any morning toilet. He was rather faint besides, and haggard.

Twice he staggered slightly on the way outdoors. Once the fire of anger vitalized him suddenly. Peering round a corner, he caught sight of Alf, "Frisky," and the instigator of their outrage, the black-mustached officer known as "Fritz." They were presumably watching for results of their night's work.

Disdaining their gloating, Slayton looked straight ahead. He was last in climbing into the van. The door was closed, and locked.

"All aboard for Palm Beach," called a hardened wag.

Presently Slayton realized he was being carried as a prisoner through streets familiar to him as a business man. By the small square of a window in the side of his moving prison he kept a lookout for landmarks. He was steadied by the effort, and the intake of fresh morning air.

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After a while the van stopped suddenly, so abruptly that the inmates packed along its sides were generally bumped, and vented their feelings profanely. Last in, Slayton was first in facing a building squat and dingy, as though justice had slumped and coarsened in the long years of judgment met for cases not so much characterized by depravity as lack of moral fibre.

Under close escort the prisoners were crowded into elevators that carried them to an upper floor. They marched through corridors, targets to eyes of the curious. At last they came to the court of examination, with brief respite in the detention pen. Only a small audience was in attendance, the type who went to court in the morning, as in the afternoon they went to the movies. In the court show was this advantage: Free admission. Not even a dime.

"Old Buzzer is up this morning," observed a nonchalant young pickpocket on Slayton's right.

By his gesture toward the bench he evidently referred to the sitting magistrate. Sallow and stockily built, the judge's round head was scantily thatched. But over his nose, as near the centre of his forehead as if it had been measured, rose a reddish lock—like some heraldic emblem. Glasses thick lensed somewhat concealed the expression of eyes that should have glinted, to enforce the suggestion of curt speech.

He had the appearance of biting off his words.

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"Old Buzzer," Slayton's neighbor of the dock had called him. Evidently, he was unpopular with habitual offenders. Stock excuses fell on deaf ears.

"You are wasting a good memory," he said at the close of a vivid tale of misfortune and police persecution. "I heard the same story, to a word, from you last year. Six months at the island."

For his own defense Slayton had matured no plan. He proposed simply to tell the truth. But he was at times uneasy in the magistrate's evident conviction that among those before him truth was scarce indeed. Still he resisted the importunities of runners for ravenous lawyers, shysters who took any job, and were reputed to be without scruple against dividing with thievish clients their receipts of criminal adventure.

"Joseph Smith!"

The clerk repeated his call. But no one responded. Then a guard beckoned Slayton to the rail.

"Ain't that your name?" he asked.

"No," Slayton succinctly responded.

An officer from the station house stepped forward and whispered to the clerk, who made a slight gesture to the interlocutor.

"Anyway, Smith's the name you're booked under," he said, taking George by the elbow. "Go forward."

A few yards, but somehow an enormous distance

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to the spot where those arraigned received summary judgment. "Old Buzzer" looked at a paper, and then at George with manifest disfavor.

"A serious charge," he snapped. "Witnesses."

Now Alf and "Frisky" came to view, and their feminine decoy. The girl seemed as when Slayton first beheld her, young and simple. Even by morning light, nothing in her appearance suggested the adventuress.

"Proceed," said the magistrate. And Alf took the laboring oar.

"I was out with my partner,"—indicating "Frisky," "just scouting around. And we spotted this man," with a wave for Slayton, "acting in a suspicious manner."

"How?" asked the judge.

"Loitering. And lamping women. Giving them the eye, I mean. We saw him speak to the complainant on East 44th. Then they went along together. It seemed like he made her. And we followed.

"In a few minutes he pushed her into a doorway, and we heard her scream. When we got there she had fought him off. But she was pretty much upset. Crying; her clothes torn; and so frightened, she could hardly stand. . . . The man made a break to get away. But we nailed him, after a little scuffle."

"It's a damned lie," said Slayton violently, as Alf ended his recital with a virtuous air.

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"Keep quiet," the judge commanded sternly.
"I'll hear you later. Is that all, officer?"

"That's what happened, Your Honor."

"Have you anything to add?"

The magistrate shot this question at "Frisky," who pulled back his head as though he feared being bitten.

"I don't think of anything else, Your Honor."

"I'll hear the complainant," snapped the judge.

As Alf and "Frisky" gave way to the girl, they taunted Slayton with a sly smile. The judge looked at her; and his expression softened somewhat. She was pleasant to the eye. Petite and simply dressed, she seemed the shy daughter of some sheltering home. Never glancing at George, she had eyes only for the court.

"What's your name?"

"Rosie, sir."

"'Rosie' what?"

"Rosie Rolff, sir. I mean, Your Honor."

The judge tossed his head as a horse exercises its neck in the stall. Then something vaguely remembered started tracery of recall in Slayton's mind. The curious toss of the head was repeated. And "Old Buzzer" turned in his chair, that he might bring to bear full power of observation.

"Well," he said, "what happened?"

Turning her back to Slayton, the girl moved nearer the bench. Her manner was timid, as one craving support. Spectators of the rear seats

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craned their necks to hear. Her words came faintly audible:

"I was at the movie. And this man sat beside me."

"What man?" asked "Old Buzzer."

Half-turning, she pointed at Slayton, then turned quickly back with a gesture of aversion, and stood silent.

"Go on," said the magistrate kindly.

"I didn't know him. But he spoke to me,—when they changed the pictures. . . . I know it isn't right to talk to strangers. But he seemed nice then. And I answered him."

Her pause for some sign of approval, or disapproval went unrewarded. "Old Buzzer" waited in silence for her to proceed.

"After the movie I saw him again. I suppose he followed me. Seems he must have. When two other men frightened me he was just behind, and drove them away. I thought he was splendid then."

Again a pleading pause without response. The flaming topknot seemed to command,—“Proceed.”

"He offered to see me home," the girl went on. "Then all at once he was awful."

Her voice sank almost to a whisper. And she clasped her hands nervously.

"He grabbed me, and pushed me into a doorway. I tried to get away; but he was too strong. Then I screamed. And fought as hard as I could."

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"I don't see any signs of hard usage this morning," commented the court.

"It's my arm, Judge. And my back and shoulders."

"I'll take a matron's opinion of that. What happened when you were about ready to give up?"

She turned to Alf and "Frisky."

"These men—I didn't know they were policemen then—came running up, and drove him away. Then they told me to come here this morning. And I went home."

"Old Buzzer" bit his pencil as if it were a cigar.

"A simple story," he observed. "Perfectly plain throughout. You said this man seemed 'nice' at the movie. He doesn't seem so now."

Slayton flushed in resentment under his appraising glance.

"Did you have much to do with his changed appearance?"

"Oh, Judge! I couldn't fight him off. He was too strong."

There was a trace of tears in her voice.

"Well, don't cry about it now. Step aside."

Roughly indulgent to her, the magistrate's voice hardened as he addressed Slayton:

"Smith, who beat you up?"

"My name isn't 'Smith.'"

George stiffened under the lash of sharp command.

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“ ‘ Joseph Smith,’ the complaint against you says. What is your name, then? ”

“ George Slayton.”

Waiting prisoners schooled in court technique viewed his claim and attitude with disfavor.

“ Not thus,” their pursed lips seemed to say, “ is the heart of justice softened.”

“ Old Buzzer ” regarded him with dangerous solicitude.

“ Related, I suppose, to the Slayton family famous just now? ”

“ Jabez Slayton’s son.”

“ Oh, yes.”

The judge glanced inquiringly about the courtroom.

“ But I don’t see any of your family here this morning.”

“ I’ve had no chance to communicate with them.”

“ Did you ask for bail, or a lawyer? ”

“ Both. And that was all the good it did me.”

Alf and “ Frisky ” shrugged their denial. But “ Old Buzzer ” did not question them.

“ Perhaps,” he said to George, “ you won’t need either. Let’s hear your side of the case now.”

“ It’s short.”

With permission to speak he shook off awkwardness born of his humiliation. Now, despite dishevelled appearance, he bore himself with the assurance of one used to respect.

Briefly, he reviewed the tale of what started as

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a stroll. His meeting with the girl; her appeal for protection; her seeming innocence; the surprise of her outcry. And in the midst of his bewilderment the police attack, followed by his arrest.

"The name of 'Joseph Smith,'" he concluded, "is a present from the sergeant that booked me."

"And he wouldn't let you send for a lawyer?" mused the judge.

"Worse than that. They tried to browbeat me into a confession. And wound up by putting something into ginger ale that kept me unconscious until just before I was brought here this morning. . . . That's the story."

"A very remarkable story."

The judge chewed his pen reflectively.

"Either you are an accomplished liar, or you have been shamefully used. . . . What have you to say?"

He turned suddenly to Alf and "Frisky," who seemed bursting with speech. Alf was the quicker.

"It's all a lie."

"Not a word of truth in it, Judge," "Frisky" chimed in.

"With this issue of veracity," said "Old Buzzer," "I think I will make an investigation. We'll pass the case for the present."

Back to the station house. And every hour precious. Slayton played his trump card.

"You don't remember seeing me before, Judge Falconer?"

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“Have I?”

The judge looked at him with fresh interest. But his eyes held no look of recognition.

“Do you remember drawing a will for Mrs. Reeves, Jabez Slayton’s sister? She died in New York about four years ago.”

“I do,” the judge responded. “What’s that to you?”

Now he regarded Slayton with the zest of a pointer that picks up a fresh trail. And George blessed the thread of memory dependent upon that reddish topknot, and the singular toss of the head.

“May I remind you,” he went on, “that George Slayton was one of the witnesses to that will?”

“Old Buzzer” considered.

“That’s right. He was. See here, Mr.—Slayton. I think you are at least entitled to an immediate inquiry. Who shall I send for to identify you?”

“Mr. Robert Kent knows me.”

“Excellent.” The judge turned to a court officer. “Find Mr. Robert Kent, and ask him to do me the favor of a call here at his earliest convenience. And have the complainant and prosecuting witnesses in this case remain.”

He looked about. With a somewhat sulky expression, Alf and “Frisky” held their ground. But the girl had disappeared.

“Where is the complainant?” demanded the judge.

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"I don't know, Your Honor," said Alf, the spokesman.

"She was here a minute ago," added "Frisky."

There was something menacing in the topknot as "Old Buzzer" inclined his head. And the suggestion was intensified by unusual slowness of speech.

"Very singular," he observed. "But I think you two can find her. And don't be long about it. . . . Step aside, Mr."—he hesitated a moment, then finished,—"Slayton."

Now an officer pointed to a chair outside the detention pen. This sign of improved standing George received gratefully. Then, with the sharpened interest of one himself threatened by the law's teeth, he watched processes of the judicial mill.

Most defendants seemed already known, and thus ticketed. Occasionally prompted by the clerk, sitting just below him, "Old Buzzer" handed out sentences with the calm precision of everyday business. First offenders had full opportunity of statement. But familiars at the bar were apt to hear sentence pronounced in the midst of florid explanation.

Hands of the big wall clock passed eleven, and approached high noon. The business of the morning session was nearly finished. And still no sign of Mr. Kent. As each prisoner was dismissed George felt the station house bars draw closer. He could not expect the judge to tarry on his account.

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A possible injustice would not outweigh plain need of lunch. As he grew increasingly nervous it seemed to him that Alf and "Frisky," who had unobtrusively returned, and whispered occasionally with an eye on the judge, gained in composure.

At last the "psychologic moment." As the prisoner's pen was cleared of its last occupant, and "Old Buzzer" leaned back with a sigh of relief, through the swinging court-room doors came Mr. Robert Kent. Unusual exertion, plus the heat of the day, had made his florid face very red. But to Slayton he wore the beauty of a bright angel of deliverance. He mopped his brow with a great lavender handkerchief as, with greeting and apology, he made his way to the bench.

"No excuses, please."

"Old Buzzer" spoke with a graciousness Slayton had not seen before.

"I appreciate your attendance in a matter that may prove of no interest to you. But we've a prisoner claiming false arrest, who says you can vouch for him."

"Ah, yes. I see."

The senior partner of the eminent firm of Kent, Farquhar & Cromwell looked a trifle astonished as his eyes explored the immediate vicinity.

"Bring 'Joseph Smith' here," directed the judge.

Resentful, but obedient, Slayton did not wait for escort. Stepping briskly to the bar, he stood fac-

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ing his shield, if indeed he had one. Mr. Kent looked at him with amazement. Then with half-incredulous recognition.

“Why, Slayton,” he said. “What has happened to you?”

“The police.”

“Then you recognize him?” asked “Old Buzzer.”

“As George Slayton. Jabez Slayton’s son. There’s no doubt of it. Though,” with further inventory of Slayton’s trampish condition, “he has seemingly taken pains to disguise himself. . . . May I ask the charge? I will appear for him, if he desires it.”

As he turned inquiringly, Slayton answered,—
“Very much.”

“The charge is assault,” explained the judge. “I think the best way to post you is to hear the evidence again. Mr. Officer, call the complainant and witnesses in the case against Joseph Smith.”

With manifest reluctance Alf and “Frisky” left their seats in a corner. But no girl appeared.

“I sent you to bring back the complainant,” the judge reminded them.

“We couldn’t find her, Your Honor.”

For once “Frisky” took the lead.

“Has she no address?”

“She wasn’t where she said she lived.”

“Old Buzzer” pulled his topknot reflectively.

“As I recall, she vanished about the time Mr. Slayton finished his statement, and asked for Mr.

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Kent, who identifies him beyond question. Her disappearance, and the fact that Mr. Slayton was forced to plead here under the name of 'Smith' makes me regard this case with suspicion."

"If there's anything crooked, we had nothing to do with it."

Alf spoke promptly, even glibly.

"Save your defense," said "Old Buzzer." "You may need it. For the present, I am inclined to place Mr. Slayton in the custody of his counsel. If Mr. Kent will accept the responsibility."

"I shall be happy to do so, Your Honor."

"Very well." The judge picked up his scattered papers. "Court is adjourned."

As Slayton left the court-room with his counsel he was painfully conscious of the contrast in their appearance. They must seem, he thought, the vagabond and the philanthropist. And he was conscious of Alf and "Frisky," following them with malevolent eyes.

"Here we are," observed the tactful Kent, at the same time hailing a taxi driver. "Where do you want to go?"

"The Racquet Club," said Slayton as the chauffeur impersonally slammed the cab door.

Brief silence as they jolted over the cobbles of down-town streets. Then the lawyer spoke, with unaccustomed diffidence:

"Don't let me bother you. But can you tell me in a few words what the rumpus is about?"

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"I can. Little girl asks protection. Foolish man promises to help her. She rewards him by yelling for help. Two of her obliging friends pop up as witnesses. Also as police officers. Off would-be knight goes to the station house, somewhat battered up. And they insist on booking him as 'Joseph Smith.' "

"But what's the game? "

Mr. Kent was manifestly perplexed.

"Did they try to shake you down? "

"Never asked me for a dollar."

"Then I don't understand it."

"I think I do."

"Will you enlighten me? "

"Simply this."

Once more Slayton went back to the Army and Navy game. To the crush at the exit, and his discovery of Leila's ruby set in diamonds. Then his vain pursuit of the wearer, and her escort, the policeman called "Fritz." Lastly, details of his false arrest and arraignment.

"Um," said Mr. Kent, with a thoughtful drumming on the window. "A clear police plant."

At that moment the taxi stopped before Slayton's club. The lawyer grew suddenly energetic.

"At last," he declared, "here's something to go on. The next trial will end in acquittal. I was confident of that before. But I want no clouds left on the horizon. We must come from court without a stain on Mrs. Slayton's reputation."

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"I hope so," said George with eloquent simplicity.

Sensing the undertone, Kent laid a sympathetic hand on his arm.

"What you need now," he observed, "is a bath and sleep. Come round to-morrow, and we'll plan the campaign. There's one advantage at least.

"If the police are hard to get at, they are also easy to find. Your hair-dresser's husband isn't likely to run away. He'll want to, though, before we get through with your fake assault case. I'll smoke them out on that at the earliest opportunity. . . . Maybe to-morrow. Anyway, come around. Take care of yourself meantime. Let little girls rescue themselves. . . . Good-bye."

He was whirled away, with a parting wave of the hand, and Slayton went up the club steps. The doorman looked askance at a disreputable appearing figure. With swelling dignity he waited, as the intruder mounted to the door.

"What ——" he began roughly.

"What ——?" he repeated, almost politely, as doubt assailed him.

"What?"

With open mouth he stared in blank amazement.

"Accidents will happen, Parker," observed Slayton casually, and went on up-stairs.

When he had bathed he was in no mood for sleep. He felt within himself the ambition and capacity for fierce endeavor. Kent could say—"To-mor-

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row." His interest in Leila was only that of a lawyer. His hope of happiness was not in her deliverance.

"But I can't rest"—Slayton addressed his reflected likeness—"until I know what those hounds are up to now."

Thought turned to the captain as he dressed for the street. An ally with infinite leisure and rare knowledge of the world. He had begged to be enrolled in the hunt for Frank Slayton's murderer. . . . Why not look him up? Anyway, an apology was due him for desertion the day before.

With a cab provided by the now eagerly attentive doorman Slayton was soon on his way down-town.

Yes, the captain was in.

"I think he's expecting you, Major," beaming Patrick assured him. He bestowed titles freely on his master's friends.

Captain Clifford sat in a purple dressing-gown, like a prelate robed. If he had any occupation but smoking, it was not evident.

"Welcome," he said, and rose with extended hand.

"I hardly expected it," Slayton observed, "after yesterday."

"No apology, please."

The captain turned a restraining gesture into a suggestive motion toward his cigar box.

"Be comfortable. You were anything but that the last time I saw you. From the way you leaped

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into that taxi I knew it was something extra-urgent."

"It was," Slayton assented, "very important. And that's what I've come to see you about."

In the captain's eyes shone a keener light, as he waited silently expectant.

"Do you remember a big man with a stiff black mustache? And a handsome, wild-looking girl in a red dress? They were squeezed in with us on the way out from the game."

"I ought to remember them." The captain touched his chest delicately. "The fellow nearly broke a few of my ribs."

"Likely enough, he's done worse than that in his time. You know, the girl wore a ring that exactly answers the description of one stolen from Leila Slayton's dresser the night of the murder. An odd ring. Diamonds and a ruby, with a black spot at in his turn.

"No wonder you were after them."

A slight access of color stained the captain's cheek. And he opened his hooded eyes a little wider.

"What luck with the chase?" he inquired.

As Slayton went on, leading into his encounter with the pathetic appearing girl, the trap sprung in his arrest, and his experience with the police, he listened without comment. Now and then he blew a wide smoke ring, and through it a smaller one. When the story was done, with Kent's providential

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appearance in court, he knocked his pipe on the fender.

"We must dress for labor," he said as he rose, and stepped in his dressing-gown into an adjoining room.

Left to his own devices, Slayton absent-mindedly drew from a waistcoat pocket the monocle he had felt would somehow yield a clue. Now the trail of the ring allured, and he attached to it no great importance. As a photograph suddenly fixed his attention he put it down on the table.

A small photograph in a pocket case, from which it protruded, so that from eyes to crowning hair the head was visible. A girlish face that stirred him with haunting resemblance.

He stooped to see it closely, fascinated, and almost irresistibly moved to take it from its cover.

"Looking at my souvenirs?" asked the captain casually at his elbow.

Slayton straightened suddenly.

"Pardon my curiosity," he said with slight stiffness. "It's a face curiously like one I know."

"Funny—these resemblances," assented the captain, as he drew the picture from its case and extended it to Slayton for further inspection.

"Does the full face sustain your impression?"

"Remarkably. It is so like someone I know, I could almost swear it is she. Taken, perhaps, ten years ago."

"That's going rather far."

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The captain picked up the eye-glass on the table, adjusted it, and gazed earnestly at the photograph in his turn.

"To be sure," he said. "You mean Mrs. Slayton. It's enough like her, or rather more than enough like her, to be her twin. No wonder you were startled."

He dropped the monocle in a pocket, and deposited the photograph in a sandalwood box. Meantime he conversationally closed the incident.

"It's a girl I met in Buenos Ayres years ago. English and Spanish, I think she was. And rather a dear. I liked her a lot. And now I can't remember her name. That's what age does to us, Slayton."

With slight grimace he took up his hat and stick.

"Shall we go now?"

Slayton was unprepared for this sudden display of energy.

"Where?" he asked.

"Wherever your Fritz, the black-mustached villain, happens to be."

Slayton hesitated.

"I'm keen to start," he said. "But I think I ought to see Mr. Kent first. He suggested my coming around to block out a campaign."

"Very well. To-morrow, then." The captain put down his hat and stick. "And remember, you command me at any time. Now may I suggest," as he stepped to the door with Slayton, "that you

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get the hair-dresser's address. Mrs. Slayton's maid will have it. They always do."

"Thanks. I will."

As Slayton crossed the park he chided himself for caprice. Impatient with the thought of delay, he had come to enlist the captain in his hunt for the girl with the ring. Then, having found him ready for instant action, he himself had interposed an excuse for delay. Why? For no reason he could think of. Unless one might so dignify his feeling about the photograph.

It was sheer nonsense, of course. It wasn't Leila. The captain did not know her. . . . But suppose he did. And further suppose it was indeed a photograph of her, taken years ago. Was there anything wrong in that? And why should he know of an acquaintance existing years before he met Leila? She did not know he had ever met the captain. And, sensing as he quite surely did his feeling for her, the captain would not parade it. Were he even a little evasive about it, that would be forgivable.

Feeling he had made a mountain out of a mole-hill, if the mole-hill existed, Slayton hailed a taxi, and gave Kent's address, with succinct direction:

"Drive like ——"

The driver's conception of obedience landed him soon and dishevelled at the main entrance to the warren in which Kent, Farquhar & Cromwell were spaciously established on the topmost floor. As the

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elevator bore him upward he reflected Kent would be astonished at his early appearance.

But Kent was not in. A clerk added the information that he was out of the city.

"Are you sure?" Slayton was incredulous. "I rode up-town with him about three hours ago."

The clerk did not deny that. Soon after Mr. Kent came in, he explained, he was called on the long distance telephone by Washington, and left for there on the one-thirty express. He did not even go to his house. A bag was packed for him, and sent to the station. When would he return? He didn't say.

"Is there anything we can do for you?" asked the clerk finally.

There was not. Feeling someone in Washington had behaved reprehensibly, Slayton turned away.

What next to do? Should he go to see Leila? It was a natural thing, he reasoned, to do. Her decree of separation was not meant to handicap the fight for her freedom. . . . But Slayton knew his immediate urgent desire was to settle the question of her acquaintance with Captain Clifford. Would he ask? After all, what right had he to question her? What would she think? He shrank from the appearance of suspicion.

Slayton pondered the question as a swaying strap-hanger in the subway. And he revolved it still when, leaving the tube some blocks below, he

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crossed the intervening streets and swung into the Avenue, toward the Slayton mansion.

It was mid-afternoon, and very quiet. A policeman sunning himself on the corner nearest the Slayton lions was for the moment the only human in sight. He raised his club in what seemed perfunctory admonition to some trifling malefactor of the park.

A minute, or it may have been two minutes, later a bystander might have seen a black limousine rounding the corner of 81st Street, and coming up leisurely. It passed Slayton, who casually noted the chauffeur was not in livery. A sharp-faced fellow, wearing a long visored cap. As he slouched at the wheel he had the air of one taking the motor out for an airing.

A little below Slayton's the car was turned in to the curb, and stopped. At once the officer came toward it, presumably to admonish the driver. Slayton was almost near enough to hear the familiar:

"Hey! No parking here."

Truth to tell, he did not note that the ensuing conversation was seemingly of an amiable, if not confidential, nature. The policeman leaned forward from the curb, and the chauffeur reciprocated from his seat at the wheel.

"Excuse me, sir," said the officer as Slayton passed, wrapped in thought of Leila and a question. Thus accosted he turned; and the patrolman added:

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"Can you give me the time? I've let my watch run down."

"Ten after three," said Slayton shortly, with feeling for policemen born of last night's experience chilling his voice.

He turned away, and went on. That moment the door of the limousine was opened. It opened quickly under the guiding hand of a man who emerged with the silent suddenness of some stalking beast of prey. One with the opportunity of cursory observation would have noted he was short and broad, with a suggestion of Slavic blood in the face momentarily exposed in his crouching descent. His right hand held something familiar to police and men of the underworld addicted to violent crime.

With a spring he was on the sidewalk. And a few seconds of stealthy speed brought his pursuit to its end. Just too late Slayton sensed danger. His half-turn in unreasoned apprehension afforded but a glimpse of something upraised and ominous he vainly tried to dodge. The sand-bag wielded by his stalker descended with paralyzing force over his right ear.

A short blow, but delivered with tremendous energy. For a fraction of a second Slayton's eyes were blinded in the enormous rush of shooting lights that seemed to scorch the very heavens. Then complete darkness engulfed him. He fell forward, so that his face was buried in the short grass

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flanking the walk. His arms were outstretched grotesquely on the pavement.

Now the policeman was galvanized into activity. After a quick turn, to assure himself there was no danger of interference, he ran forward to where Slayton lay.

"Quick!" he said to the man bending over his victim.

One on either side, they raised the inert body, and dragged it the few yards to the motor. The human rat at the wheel reached back to open the door closed by him after his companion's sudden exit. Stepping in, Slayton's assailant reached out for what was left of him. The officer lifted, while he pulled.

There was a momentary delay, as the officer grunted a request for time to get a grip without exposure to dark blood flowing sluggishly from clots in the matted hair. Turning a face with slight semblance of life to the left, he gave a vigorous shove. And the man within lifted strongly. The job was done.

Pulled from within, the door of the limousine closed sharply. In a few seconds the car was under way. Throughout its stop in the Avenue the engine had been kept running. But quick as he was in his departure, the chauffeur betrayed no anxiety, or need of haste. At moderate and gradually accelerated speed he turned the nearest corner. And the

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next right he took, swinging into a street leading up-town.

By this time a pedestrian had appeared near the scene of the assault. He noted a small spot of fresh blood on the sidewalk, and looked nervously over his shoulder, as if expecting to be taxed with responsibility. Then he hurried onward.

The Slayton lions still guarded either side of old Jabez's steps. But they told nothing. Their appearance was that of beasts about to sleep. And the policeman who knew what had happened to George Slayton went down the Avenue, whistling softly as he swung his stick.

CHAPTER XI

AND LEILA RIDES

To save him Leila had sent Slayton away. There was a secret in her heart she could not bid him enter. And bitter months had so impregnated her consciousness with the web of circumstantial evidence drawn about her that sometimes she seemed to feel it as physical substance pressing into her flesh.

Hope she could, but walk alone she must. Fortitude rallied its forces. And she was steady again as she turned toward life, closing a compartment of tender memory with Slayton's disappearance, an incarnation of vigorous resolve. He somehow seemed so young. And she as old as grief.

When Marie entered she smiled.

"Oh, Madame!"

The maid's face was eloquent with joyous surprise.

"What is it, Marie?"

"I am so glad."

Here at least was a heart of gold; a heart athrill with adoration. Leila bethought herself of a way to reward it.

"I wonder," she said, "if I have anything fit to wear this season."

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Marie's face grew radiant.

"Madame feels—so much better. I knew it."

"It is partly your doing, Marie."

She put a hand on the maid's shoulder—very gently.

"We are happier, you know, with those who love us." Warm lips were pressed upon her fingers. "Now let us go up, and rummage."

Humming as she worked, Marie invaded trunks, closets, and packing-cases. The contents of drawers she sorted with ardor. And Leila submitted to her with indifferent sweetness.

But once calmness deserted her. It was when Marie held up for her inspection a gown of black veined with silver. At sight of it memory pierced her like a sword. She had worn it that night when lips long sealed had yielded a tender confession. The only time George Slayton had held her in his arms.

"Put it away," she said, and averted her face.

With wistful eyes Marie obeyed.

Now the minutes seemed to lengthen. The creations of beauty about her Leila viewed as a sad stranger.

At last luncheon came to her relief, routine with its erasing absorption of time. Though she had little appetite, she rose from the table regretfully.

She stood at the window, and saw life whirling past. Mellow weather, and Saturday afternoon. The week-end in which those whose vocation is

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amusement receive somehow a fillip from the multitude snatching its scanty hour of play.

Leila remembered Slayton's mention of the Army and Navy game. He was there now—one with society that had placed her under its ban. But at least the great outdoors, and God's free air, for the time being were hers.

She pressed a button. And presently down the hall came the "Click-click" of Marie's heels.

"We are going for a ride," Leila said without turning. "Will you get me a wrap, and order the closed motor?"

"Yes, Madame."

No need to turn to know pleasure so coloring the maid's voice.

Soon they were in the midst of traffic, threading their way to quiet streets. The contact, more mental than physical, was strangely disquieting to one long shut off.

"Anywhere, so long as we keep out of the crowd," Leila had instructed the chauffeur.

They rolled through parks, and past children at play. And within a few miles of the nation's great parade ground of Fifth Avenue they chanced upon streets as rustic as those of some sleepy village in the Catskills.

When the sun was low they came down the Hudson. In the rich haze its rugged banks saluted the eye much as they must have done when Henrik Hudson picked his cautious way. And the smoke

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of industry enhanced the glory of the sky. Under its flaming banners floated the ships of commerce—poetic, strange. Leila felt her soul cleansed and comforted.

Dinner past, she was moved to play. Old airs, simple, sweet, and restful withal. The music men write in times of great trouble. . . . By the piano Marie sat, her face bright with happiness.

With its inevitable sadness the day had brought a measure of relaxation. Leila felt less like the numbered creature of a soulless system as, retiring early, she turned off her reading light. Plato had not consoled her the night before. Now she trusted to Nature's ministrations.

After a time sleep, less urgently wooed, came. And music threaded through Leila's dream. It was "Fidelio"; and clarinet and bassoon sang Florestan's dungeon aria. The tide of passion rose to the trumpet calls of deliverance. In the last crowning outburst of triumphant gladness she woke.

Was it a symbol? She wondered, as consciousness groped for the findings of sleep. And so she passed again to the anodyne of dreams.

The full graciousness of October was manifest when daylight came. Sunlight poured warmly through an open window. And somewhere near a lingering bird of summer brightened the moment by his rill of song.

In the midst of her toilet there came to Leila a vision of leafy stretches along bridle paths in the

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park. And of poor Scipio moping in his stall. A groom might exercise him. But who in the months of her enforced absence had offered confidences to wagging ears? Or sugar to his nuzzling lips?

She felt strong impulse to test in a surging canter the sweetness of release. Marie, quickened by love to divine her every mood, would understand. With a little smile she turned to her with a question:

“What shall I do this afternoon?”

“It is a beautiful day,” Marie hopefully suggested.

“For a ride in the park,” her mistress supplemented.

“Oh, Madame! . . . The blue habit?”

“If you think so.”

Hastily, lest her idol experience a change of heart, Marie drew the habit from its closet. With a slight uplift of spirit she had not experienced since the dark night that so distorted life Leila put it on.

“There will be no more beautiful lady in the park,” the maid said with enthusiasm, as she surveyed the finishing touch.

“You are prejudiced, Marie. But I like to have you think so.”

Unprejudiced eyes might have found that in Marie's estimate love did not err. By its revealing simplicity the habit brought out beauty of line and fine poise. Leila's careless glance at her mirror

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turned to keener interest. For the first time she saw herself with the eyes of a woman who prizes a man's love.

The telephone rang, and Marie took up the receiver on the dressing-table.

"What is it?" she asked. "Yes. . . . Will you give to me the message?"

Again she listened, and answered: "I will ask."

"A man wishes to see you, Madame," she explained.

"What does he want?"

"He says he must tell it to Madame—alone."

Suspicion entered Leila's mind. Was this another ruse of the press? With the resourcefulness of reporters she had had painful experience.

"Tell him," she instructed, "I cannot see him, unless I know in advance what he wants."

From further colloquy the maid turned with an expression of relief.

"It is Mr. George sends him."

"Where is he?"

"Here, Madame. He speaks on the house telephone."

"Tell him I will come down."

Leila descended with tenderness and conjecture in her mind. Tenderness for Slayton in that, strong as she knew his need of her to be, he remained aloof in obedience to her will. But for some good reason, a reason trusted to neither telephone nor post, he had sent a messenger to her.

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. . . Had he already discovered something important in her case?

At first glance she decided the messenger was not George's friend. Possibly some sort of employe. Tall and dark, his bristling mustache and hard black eyes pointed truculent personality. His dress was the commonplace dress of millions of nondescript men. His manners, awkward. Standing by a window as Leila entered, he turned with a little bow.

"You wish to see me?" she questioned.

"A message from Mr. George Slayton, Ma'am."

"Well," she said with a trace of haughtiness; for the man made no movement of delivery. "Give it to me."

"He sent me to tell you."

"What?"

"That he has gone away for a while, Ma'am. And not to worry."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

It was strange. A message that, with their compact of aloofness, had no meaning. And an assumption of intimacy confided to a menial stranger, whose manner was subtly insolent. She was tempted to dismiss him without further question. But anxiety conquered pride.

"Why did he not write?"

"I don't know, Ma'am. He seemed to be in a hurry."

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"Do you know where he is?" she asked after a moment's hesitation.

"I can't say."

What seemed like stubbornness appeared in the man's manner, as he stood there, twirling his hat.

"What is your name?" she asked, with a view of future checking.

"Smith, Ma'am. John Smith."

Somehow his answer impressed her as a palpable invention.

"Thank you," she said, as she drew from her purse a bank-note extended with the gesture of largess. He took it readily enough, and backed from the room with a little bow. Watching a minute at a window, she saw him accosted by a policeman on the corner. Possibly to learn why one of his appearance came from the front door of a Fifth Avenue mansion, instead of the servants' quarters. At any rate, he was not detained. Going on, he was lost to view in a West Side street.

"Madame—is going out?"

It was Marie at her elbow, a picture of solicitude.

"Yes," she said. "And you're coming with me. I want more freedom than the life of the park to-day. We'll go to the cottage instead."

"Ah!" said Marie in pure ecstasy.

"Scipio will be glad to see me. They tell me no one else rides him. Will you ask Carlin to order the car?"

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“Yes, Madame.”

As Leila waited at the window buoyancy departed from her. And cold clouds that habitually banked her horizon in recent months came rolling up again. To the burden of her own situation was added anxiety for Slayton.

The meaning of the call and message, if indeed it was a message from George, she could not make out. Some clarifying thought might come in the open. But no light was vouchsafed as the car bore her swiftly and smoothly through the parkway, on toward open country.

Some thirty miles they rode with grave abstraction on the part of her mistress that Marie noted with timid solicitude. As the chauffeur drove through the entrance to one of the Slayton country places made her own in the sense of personal supervision she was still in doubt what, if anything, to do.

She embraced with her eyes the hospitable seeming Mansard roof, and turned abruptly to the waiting chauffeur.

“Have Scipio sent over at once.”

Presently appeared the horse, a dancing chestnut. And at his flank a groom bestrode a big gray.

“No escort to-day,” she said, as she stepped from the groom’s hand to the saddle.

“Very well, Madam. At what time shall I call?”

“You needn’t call. I will stop at the stable.”

Looking a bit dubiously at her restive mount, he

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touched his cap and rode slowly away. As she tightened the reins, the merest touch, they were off with a sharp clatter of hoofs.

What need to return?

Glimpses of neighboring roofs grew scarcer, and the highways less groomed. She cantered down roads in which the vision of a woman on horseback thrilled slovenly natives as some fleeting vision of the screen.

After a time her blood grew calmer. And Scipio was left largely to his own devices. He could not help her think.

What to think? The message was still a complete puzzle. As she pondered it, the more sinister it seemed.

Mr. Kent must be told. Probably should have been told without loss of time. Chiding herself for even a few hours' delay, she yet shrank from confiding to him her alarm. For in all the lawyer's efforts on her behalf it had never been intimated that Slayton's interest in her was more than that of a sympathetic friend.

Scipio paused by a ploughed field in a region of market gardens. It was a crossroads corner, with one road lost to view in its curving climb of a wooded hill. On the far edge of the furrowed expanse figures of men bent to labor seemed no less a product of the soil than crimsoning maples against which they were displayed, as on a screen. All the countryside was cradled in the arms of

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Indian summer. Not even a dog barked in the distance.

“R-r-rh! Rr-r-r-uh!”

Out of the concealing curve at the foot of the hill rushed a big car. Almost brushing Scipio's bridle, it came upon horse and rider without warning. And with its mounting discordant cry it was lost to view in a cloud of dust.

The cloud settled slowly. And when the air was clear again Scipio had vanished. What of his rider? One happening to look that way might have seen in the neighboring field, and against the inner edge of its enclosing wall, a trim foot and a bit of blue habit.

Near its zenith the mounting sun poured mellow warmth. A chipmunk came scherzo from a neighboring tree, and gave the foot resting so still against the wall bright-eyed observation. Then it went its way in quest of nuts with a casual observation.

Very long it would have seemed to one conscious and suffering before any human being came upon the scene. Then a sedate rattle of wheels foretold the approach of a farm wagon, drawn by a flea-bitten gray. With loosely held reins, his elbows resting on his knees, the driver seemed half-asleep. Would he pass unwitting?

A bird burst from a bush with a sudden flutter of wings. And eyes languidly attracted brightened in keener interest. With a “Whoa!” and a check-

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ing pressure on the reins, the man brought his cart to a stop, and sat looking at the boundary wall.

At the wall, and the foot, mute signal of distress. Scratching his stubbled chin, the driver draped his reins on the nag's trustworthy back, and climbed down. A somewhat elderly man, with rheumatism in his joints. He went gingerly, with a preliminary observation, over the wall.

First, with a delicacy that obtains in simple society, he removed the foot from the wall, and smoothed the habit in a decorous fold. The woman was unconscious of his consideration. She lay on her left side, her head in a furrow—very still. So still it surpassed natural slumber.

Jutting into the furrow, as the plough had rasped along its side, a partially upturned boulder was some inches distant from her head. Had she come into violent contact with it in falling? There was no blood on her face. Not even a bruise disfigured its paleness.

Stooping, the man touched her cheek with his toil-stained fingers. She did not move, or open her eyes. The faint breath came and went too delicately for his observation. In her wrist he clumsily felt for the pulse. A faint but fairly regular beat.

Straightening with a sigh of relief, he took stock of the situation. Then with much sighing, for the cold stiffness of age was in his stringy muscles, he lifted the inert body, and bore it carefully through a breach in the wall. Stripping his seat of its

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cushion, he made a head-rest on a pile of bagging. It was hard lifting her in. In the first effort he failed, rubbing his back ruefully when he had put her down. But the next effort was a success. So he put up the tail-board, and climbed again into his seat.

As he lifted the reins from the gray's back, it straightened legs that had seemed to prop it, lessening the burden of direct support, and wagged its ears in token of reëstablished understanding. A forefoot advanced soberly; and the cart moved with a slight squeaking of wheels.

They had but a little way, seemingly, to go. Of its own accord the gray turned up a lane fenced with stone and bordered by elderly trees. Some hundreds of yards in from the road, and quite beyond the range of passing travellers' casual observation, stood a large cream-colored house.

A house of many windows. But on most of them the blinds were closed. Once the residence of some country gentleman, one would have said. But changed for the worse. In its later estate it had somewhat the look of an old and slatternly fellow—a slippered snuff-taker.

Pulling up at the corner of the piazza, the old man uttered one of those half-articulate conjugal calls. From somewhere within the summons was answered.

CHAPTER XII

AT THE HEAD OF THE STAIRS

“WHAT hit me?”

Slayton struggled with confused impressions. A slight movement of his head sent a stab of pain through the eyes. What was the matter with the back of his head, anyway? He tried to investigate with his right hand. Then with his left. No use. He could raise neither.

The effort sharpened physical sensation and brought a measure of clearness to his laggard mind, groping its way through heavy mist. Now he realized his hands were tied. From the feeling a stiff cord was the bond. It was so tight the hands were numb. And the slightest movement made him realize his wrists were badly chafed. They must have been bound for a considerable period.

Instinctively he tried to ease his position. Then he knew his feet also were tied; and with the same thoroughness. Further, they were fastened to some solid base resisting his efforts to move.

His head at least was free. And tactile sensations of the body corroborated his eyes. . . . It was night. Dim light admitted by a partially darkened window sufficed to show the room in which he lay was a large and sparsely furnished chamber.

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The bed in which he lay, a bureau he recognized by its outline, and one chair standing stiffly by the window,—seemed all the furniture.

A slight sound, as of a match scratched, abruptly switched him from laborious appraisal of his surroundings to vigilant quest of a human presence. The sound came again. And with it relaxation. It was only the tapping of a branch against a window-pane. Seeing the tree's swaying shadow, he registered the fact that an upper-story room was his prison.

Where was he? And how had he come there? He struggled back to the terrific shock of the last second before unconsciousness. Then another step. A policeman had accosted him to ask for the time of day. At the time it had seemed peculiar, considering the precise schedule by which police officers live and work. Now Slayton's mind, shaken but retentive of events preceding this latest attack, identified it as part and parcel of a conspiracy to put him away. And apparently the conspirators were not particular about what occurred in the process.

But how could this thing have happened, in mid-afternoon on Fifth Avenue? And almost within a stone's-throw of his own home.

As he cast about for some explanation the sound of voices came to his ears. Though he lay motionless, and straining to hear, at first he could neither understand what was said nor where the voices

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came from. And still further was he baffled as to means by which they were transmitted. At last he knew.

The conversation was in the next room. That he gleaned by the sense of hearing. Discovery of the conductor involved a process of deduction. There was, he now perceived, a fireplace in the inner wall. And presumably its counterpart on the other side. Both probably in disuse, but with some ventilator left open. And thereby words of vital import came to him, as he lay there helplessly attentive.

A man and a woman were speaking. Evidently they had no dread of being overheard. There was no effort to moderate tone. In the man's voice a certain thickness and overemphasis betrayed indulgence in liquor. The woman's voice was naturally heavy; and at first suggestive of defiant mood.

"What do I get out of this?"

The first words Slayton distinguished. It was the woman's voice, with an accent of suspicion.

"Well," the man answered with a little laugh, "you get me."

"How do I know you won't throw me down?"

"Do you think Fritz Colahan is a four-flusher?"

"Well, you don't give Dora much of a square deal."

She spoke half-defiantly, and added:

"Not that it's any hunt of mine what you do to her."

"Fritz Colahan?" . . . "Dora?"

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With these names Slayton was possessed of a theory of his situation. If it was the Fritz before identified as a police detective, and the husband of Leila's hair-dresser, garrulous Dora, with him, probably, was the girl he had discovered wearing Leila's ring. . . . So his quarry still insisted upon changing places with him.

Now Fritz raised his voice in anger.

"Listen to me! What I do to Dora is no business of yours. Anybody might suppose I was leaving you instead of her."

"But all the same ——"

"Shut up! If you do as I tell you, you'll come out all right. . . . If you don't!—Well, you know it ain't healthy to monkey with the police."

"I guess you're in deeper than I am," she retorted.

"And I'm on the inside. You're on the outside. That's the difference. . . . Do you get me?"

Silence for a moment. Then he resumed.

"All right, then. That's understood. Now remember: You keep a sharp eye out for strangers. Don't forget the jig is up for us,—for you just the same as me, if that man is seen by anybody outside. . . . He won't be, so long as you don't slip up in looking after him. . . . See?"

"But what'll your father and mother think?"

"The old man, and woman?"

Fritz's voice was saturated with contempt.

"Why, they'll swallow anything I tell them.

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Sometimes I wonder how they ever happened to have Fritz Colahan as a son." He seemingly paused to luxuriate in self-satisfaction. Then he resumed:

"My old man thinks the feller tied up in there is a prisoner I was too busy to take to the station to-day. So I've just parked him here for the night."

"How long will it be?" the woman asked.

"A day or two, maybe. Till I can fix things for our getaway. There's some diamonds to be sold."

"One thing I got to know."

"Well?"

His tone was challenging.

"I got a crush on you, Fritz. You know that, I guess. But I won't put my neck in the noose for any man."

A brief silence. Then a sound as of a jug set down heavily. The woman spoke again.

"Better quit that. You've had too much to drink already. . . . And I want an answer."

"What do you mean?" Fritz said in surly fashion.

"Just this: I'm no fool."

Her voice rose defiantly.

"Now I want to know who the man is. Tell me that. And what's all the row about the ring you gave me? You're keeping me in the dark. I won't stand it. I want a show-down."

Slayton was painfully alert lest he miss a syllable of Fritz's grudging answer.

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"You want to know too much," he growled. "Just remember I'm working for you the same as me. Just remember that feller has got to be kept quiet. I'll tell you who he is, and all about the ring, when we get aboard the ship. And that's straight."

"You wouldn't double-cross me, Fritz?"

A fist smote a table.

"Hell, Angie! Don't you want to go to South America? Wouldn't you like to see a bull fight? And dance, and wear swell dresses? And have a drink when you want it? And by and by go to Paris? . . . Of course you would. But what's got into you?"

"I don't know."

By her voice Slayton knew she was half-mollified. Presently she said:

"All right. I'll do what you want."

One might have imagined the succeeding silence filled with a rough caress. A chair was pushed back, with sounds of the pair's advance to the door. Then the man's parting words:

"That's the stuff. Play the game. To-morrow morning you plant yourself right here. Your job is to see this fellow stays flat."

"Will I see you?" she asked.

"Later in the day. I got to whack up with Alf and Frisky. But I'll be back by noon. Then for good old Rio, and no more trouble. Hunky-dory, eh?"

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“All right. Good-night.”

Her steps retreated. Those of Fritz advanced. They paused outside the room in which Slayton lay. And there came a fumbling at the door. With some manipulation a key was turned in the protesting lock. A slight squeak of hinges, and the door was opened. Slayton saw the outline of a burly figure.

Silently he awaited the enemy's approach. The man stood over him, and drew something from a pocket. Anticipating the action, Slayton closed his eyes against the flash of an electric lantern.

“Don't play possum,” grunted Fritz. “I guess you've come to by this time. I'm too old a hand to crack a skull, unless I mean to.”

He stooped to test the knots at Slayton's wrists and ankles. Seemingly they satisfied him, regardless of his captive's condition.

“I guess you're safe,” he observed. “And it won't break my heart if you ain't comfortable. Next time you won't be so anxious to tackle the police. Heh?”

No answer. He brought his light again to bear on Slayton's face, expressionless with its closed eyes, and turned away, chuckling.

“Pleasant dreams,” he said derisively, as he closed the door. But he did not lock it.

When the man's retreating footsteps died away the house was given over to silence. Silence save for those little sounds known to the sleepless. Slayton was cognizant of a rat's manœuvre. And he

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heard the mysterious creaking of a board; the faint rustle of a bough so lightly brushing a window-pane.

He heard such sounds in intervals between painful efforts to free himself. It was not a promising prospect. Rather a remote one. But he had unusual suppleness of joint. And hours with Houdini, a contortionist known to the multitude as the "Handcuff King," were now to bear good fruit not predicted.

To free the right hand was his initial enterprise. Hardly able to stir, he could give it no assistance. But with patient endurance he turned the wrist this way and that, setting his teeth to endure exquisite torture.

Feeling a slight loosening at last, he redoubled his efforts. A last lacerating tug, and the hand worked free. Then he rested briefly, while returning blood coursed with vitalizing influence.

With the right free, release of the left hand was soon accomplished. The feet, however, still presented serious difficulties. Ingenuity had been lavished on them in the tying of knots. And his eyes offered slight assistance in the heavy darkness. But he maintained a somewhat difficult sitting posture as he worked away. A thrust of the legs, like the commencement of a stroke in swimming, softened the confining cord, rendered thereby more responsive to his fingers. Its stiffness and moderate diameter were factors in his favor.

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At last he was free. As he stretched himself unrestrained a moonbeam entered, playing on the farther wall. By that he knew it must be late. For the moon was declining.

Still, he did not rise at once. Some minutes he rested, feeling vigor return. It was the part of wisdom. For what was ahead would probably tax his utmost energy.

He moved cautiously. And the bed squeaked as he put a foot over the side. Then a board contributed a complementary creak with his first step from a strip of carpeting to the bare floor. Unlacing them as he stood there, he removed his shoes. Two quick, noiseless steps took him to the window.

It was a second-story room. Not over fifteen feet to the ground. And a substantial arm of a big elm growing at a corner of the house was so near the window-sill he might conceivably swing out to it. But he only registered this possible mode of escape as a commander takes stock of eventualities.

Now he made quick investigation of his pockets. Evidently, his abductors had not cared to rifle his person. His keys and small change were untouched; likewise his bill-book. And his watch was still running. He held it to his ear, and took an observation by moonlight.

Midnight. It was time to act. Flexed arms and legs proving properly responsive, he moved to the door. Remembering its audible hinges, he

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lifted as he turned the knob, and stepped into the hall.

The heavy silence held a menace. There was no window on that side where the moon played. He waited for a minute or so, hoping to receive some information by readjustment of his eyes. But with all their straining it was still too dark.

Feeling for matches, his hand came upon a small box of wind tapers. A sure light, and noiseless, with greater illuminating power than matches in general. But once started, they burned to the end, regardless of breath or flipping fingers. There was a possible awkward second, if it came to need of quick extinguishment. But it would be much more awkward to stumble, or go wrong on the head of the stairs. Decidedly.

He struck a taper, quickly shielding it with his disengaged hand. As it burned clear he saw the room from which he had come was not near the head of the stairs. From the floor on which he stood they receded into blackness. But he guessed the hall was substantially duplicated on the ground floor. Probably rooms opening into it on either side, and the wide front door directly ahead. He would have wagered it was so from what he knew of the northeastern states, and old-fashioned country houses. It was important to have a theory in mind. For in a pinch salvation might depend on instinctive wisdom.

So much for the way outdoors. . . . The

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taper had burned out. He listened briefly for any sound of stirring life. The stillness was unbroken. He opened the box for another taper. It was empty. He had used the only one.

Mentally reproaching himself for failing to note the box held but one light, he turned to the wall and began his cautious movement to the left. Foot by foot, he felt the way.

The first door marked by his finger-tips was that of the room from which had come the voices of Fritz and his mistress in their revealing conversation. He paused there a moment confirming his expectation of silence.

Another step. And in the instant the light sound of rapid movement came to his vigilant ears. With clenched hands he crouched in the darkness. The sound died almost in the second of his perception. And it was not repeated. Probably some rodent's enterprise.

He stealthily moved on. The second door. And the third. He placed his left ear against it. For it seemed to him something moved. With such intentness he listened that even an occupant's light breathing must be heard. But he distinguished no sound.

He crept on. The head of the stairs could be only a few steps distant. His right foot collided with something—probably a chair. Instantly he paused. He was aware of someone listening there in the darkness. A second of pregnant silence filled by a challenging presence.

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Now Slayton heard a movement of one leaping from bed. Next a chair blocking a door was swept aside.

Over the flash of an electric light in his half-dazzled eyes he beheld the scowling visage of Fritz.

With perception came the dictate of retreat. He had neither light nor weapons. And his first imperative need was reestablished connection with the outside world.

“ Ah-h ! ”

His enemy's guttural exclamation, charging after him into the hall, was the only word spoken. Slayton covered him with his eyes, as he backed in the direction of the stairs. He saw him shift the electric torch from his right hand to the left, and reach backward to a hip-pocket. It could mean but one thing.

In a flash Slayton took the initiative. He was upon Fritz before the detective could draw his revolver. But he still strove for it, as it stuck in the holster, throwing up defensively his left arm.

With a powerful blow Slayton drove the electric torch from his fingers. It went out as it struck the floor. . . . The two closed there in the darkness. It was Slayton's purpose to pinion the detective's right hand, while the latter fought to free it.

Fritz was the heavier ; possibly the stronger ; and certainly less scrupulous. As they swayed to and

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fro, heads close together and feet far apart, with each guarding against being tripped, Slayton felt hot breath, and heard the vicious snap of teeth grazing his cheek. He threw his head back instinctively. And as he did so a heel caught in the loosened hall matting.

It was the moment Fritz selected for a furious charge. With Slayton giving ground they crashed into the stair railing. It yielded with the sharp snap of splintering wood. And they fell together.

It was too sudden to guard against. And in the second or two of their projection through space they were almost motionless. Fate, which some call chance, brought them down with the detective more extended, so that his head struck on a broad stair beyond the strip of padded matting that marked the centre tread. Slayton's head landed heavily on his enemy's left shoulder.

Thus they fell; and did not desist from falling until they landed at the foot of the stairs. The house had swallowed sounds of their heavy descent before either moved. Clear of the shock of concussion, and breathing naturally again, Slayton pushed aside Fritz's arm thrown across his breast. Next he cautiously withdrew his left leg, on which a portion of his foe's body had lain at the end of their cascading descent of the stairs.

His freedom in these movements at once astonished and reassured him. By great good luck he had escaped both fracture and sprain. What had

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happened to Fritz gave him no concern but relief. For the moment at least he was harmless. He lay as one dead. And when Slayton, who hastened to rise for best defense, stooped to possess himself of the fought-for revolver, there was still no indication of consciousness.

It was necessary to move the body. As he pushed it over on the left side the right hand fell with a soft thud on the bare floor. Slayton shivered; and he stood up with the revolver in his hand.

There was no time for cogitation on the detective's fate. Somewhere above a door opened, with a succeeding brightness in the upper hall. Then someone called:

"What's the matter?"

An old man's voice, with a little quaver, despite an effort to make it firm. Slayton stood silent, his eyes on the stairs. Again he heard the voice above:

"Where are you, Fritz?"

The man was advancing now to the head of the stairs. And preceding him a wavering light Slayton judged to be that of a kerosene lamp. Hesitating no longer, he turned to the door.

It was locked with a heavy key that turned easily enough. And further fastened with a bar and chain. The chain rattled a little as he worked the bar, testing which way it would slide. As he pushed it up the last barrier to freedom was removed. And none too soon.

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“God a-mighty!”

Slayton had a glimpse of a gray-haired figure standing with a light lifted above its head. An old man in his night-clothes, with the appearance of spavined age, and tousled hair.

“What you doin’ here?” he demanded, a bit quaveringly, as Slayton opened the door. The body of Fritz blocked it, so that he had to step over his still inert enemy, and make a sidewise exit. Behind him he heard the old man’s voice, now charged with horror:

“Fritz! What have they done to you, Fritz?”

What to do? Slayton stood a moment on the piazza, considering surroundings wholly unfamiliar. Strengthening light in a square of glass set into the door accelerated his decision. A few hurried strides to the left gave him shelter behind a large tree.

After minutes seeming to him much longer the front door was opened to an extent indicating the detective’s body had been moved. And the old man advanced a step to the piazza. Lamp in hand, he stood peering about. Foolhardy behavior, had Slayton been criminally inclined. Seemingly that was the impression of someone behind him. Appearing to take counsel, he hastily retired, and closed the door.

Somewhere in the distance that was New York a light flared against the western sky. As if it were a signal to him Slayton stepped forth tentatively.

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Then he stepped back in haste. The gods were still taking matters from his hands.

Its engine so attuned it merely purred in the still night air, a car came winding up the driveway, heralded by its headlight more than any sound it made. A hundred yards or so from the house, and some fifty from where Slayton crouched, it came to a stop with sudden extinguishment of its lights. As it approached under overarching trees he distinguished only the figures of two men, the driver, and a man who sat beside him.

They now alighted, and stood a moment in inaudible conversation. With suspicion he cherished, Slayton was reminded of Alf and "Frisky." But he could not be certain. They separated as he strained to catch some word of their conversation.

While one remained, as if on guard, the shorter stooped to scoop up something from the gravelled area by the steps, and went on around a corner of the house. Slayton heard a sound as of pebbles thrown against a window. Twice it was repeated.

Next the rasping of a window raised, and low-toned colloquy. The short man rejoined his companion, and they went up the piazza steps together. Presently a light shone through the glass of the front door. It was opened, and the recent arrivals entered.

What the gods provide. Hesitation in Slayton's mind was but momentary. Keeping low, he crossed

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the distance between his tree and the car on the run. He stepped in, and reached for the self-starter. Under his hand. Everything about the car seemed natural. Fortune had provided the duplicate of his own latest motor.

He switched on the lights, to make sure of their response, and at once switched them off again. Then he backed to get sufficient room to turn. He had made half the circle before the house when the front door flew open. Malign chance, for it could hardly have been any sound of the perfectly working car, brought one of its putative owners on the scene of departure.

In the next second Slayton put his foot on the accelerator, and switched on more power. And his discoverer was no more tardy. There was no command to halt. Nor on either side any word spoken.

With the leap of the car, almost grazing an elm as he brought it with a sharp turn into the long slope to the highway, came the bark of a pistol. Slayton heard the song of the bullet, and the impact with a tree. He bent lower over the wheel, and concentrated on the task of keeping the car in the drive. It was difficult enough without the lights he had no time to turn on.

After the first shot he heard for a few seconds the crunch of gravel under sprinting feet. They stopped with the second shot, which went wider than the first. Then the range was lost in the trees,

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and his escape became a matter of safe management with the car, providing, of course, there was no other motor available for pursuit. That seemed so improbable it gave him no concern.

With lessened speed, and the headlights now serving him, he discerned the street running at right-angles ahead, and swung instinctively to the left. Now he let out the car in a silent run toward the dull glow, banked along a wide horizon, that marked New York's night existence in hours between hectic gayety and gray dawn.

A few sleepy marketmen and whistling milk cart drivers were abroad. Otherwise the streets were deserted as he rode through the countryside, into dark suburbs, the squalid fringe of paved districts, and better lighted streets where an occasional lethargic policeman decorated a corner.

No one seemed curious concerning his identity or errand. It occurred to him that if questioned he would not know what name to give. Then he drove a little faster.

Where to? Under the circumstances he had no mind to turn in for what remained of the night. The day soon to dawn might decide the current of Leila's life and his own.

To secure Fritz and his companion was more than ever important. But how? Would the police assist him? With Mr. Kent absent he turned naturally to Captain Clifford. Anyway, if his enterprise proved very irregular, as seemed prob-

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able, a knight of casual adventures would be a better aide than a man of law.

Late as it was, he kept on to the little park on the border of which were the captain's rooms. And unheeding the remonstrance of sleepy birds, he vigorously pressed the electric bell. Sooner than he anticipated the captain's head appeared, with preliminary sound of an opened window.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said quite casually, as Slayton stepped from the vestibule. "Come on up."

Clifford was waiting at his door when he reached the upper floor.

"Well, what's up?" he asked, ushering his visitor in.

"I've had a hell of a time ——" Slayton began.

"It looks like," observed the captain, craning his neck for a better look at traces of the Fifth Avenue assault. "Somebody tried to murder you?"

"I don't think they were particular," said Slayton grimly, "one way or the other. I was after the black-mustached brute, and the ruby ring. And he was still after me. Spryer, too, I'll admit. He's scored twice on me now. And it's time for me to make a final tally on him."

"A pious sentiment," the captain admitted gently. "Are you going to let me in on it?"

"That's what I've come for."

The captain lighted a cigarette, and replaced his case on Slayton's gesture of refusal.

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"Will it keep till daylight?" he inquired.

"Just about, I think."

"Then sleep is the thing for you now. You think you can't, but you can. You're nearer all in than you know. And a couple of hours' rest will do you a world of good. I know by personal experience."

"But if I don't wake ——"

"You will wake. I'll look out for that. And Patrick will take your car round to my garage."

"It isn't my car. I stole it."

"Very interesting," said the captain serenely. "You must tell me about it, after you've had a nap. . . . No more 'buts,' please."

He had Slayton by the elbow, conducting him to the bathroom, where he saturated a sponge, and began investigation of the injury over his ear in a matter-of-fact way. As he did so he whistled softly.

"A nasty clout," he observed presently, and proceeded to apply a strip of plaster. "I congratulate you on the thickness of your skull. No reference, of course, to its furnishing."

With some little scissors taken from a cabinet he trimmed the plaster neatly.

"There you are. Now come along in here."

"I'm being a nuisance," Slayton protested.

"Nothing of the sort. I'm suffering for something to do. And you provide it. The debt is on my side. I'm much obliged."

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Amiably coercive, he led Slayton into a small adjoining room.

"There's a couch," with a wave of his hand. "And here's a dressing-gown," drawing the garment from a closet. "And pajamas. Now get out of your clothes, and see how much sleep you can crowd into about a hundred and twenty minutes."

"Suppose I fail to wake in time?" said Slayton, tempted, but still doubtful.

"Don't suppose it. I won't let you. I've an alarm-clock in my head that never fails."

"All right, then ——"

"Good-bye."

Already the captain was closing the door.

"I wonder if I can sleep," Slayton meditated as he untied the first shoe. Two or three minutes later he again took counsel with himself, as he stood before a dresser, one elbow on it, and his head resting on a supporting hand. There seemed to be a gap in consciousness to bridge over.

"Where am I?"

His mind lurched back into working order.

"Oh, yes. . . . Well, I mustn't go to sleep standing up."

With what speed he could command he completed a sketchy toilet. Then with inexpressible weariness he dropped on the couch, and drew a cover over himself.

His eyelids seemed self-sealed. And noiselessly, with increasing speed, a dun-colored cloud came

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rolling toward him across a wide plain. With neither will nor power to avoid it, he awaited its sweet suffocation. In sudden acceleration it rolled over him. And he knew no more.

CHAPTER XIII

DOCTOR MAURY TAKES A HAND

IT was a strange room. And a bare room. But not the bareness of that cell Leila visualized with a shudder, as memory threw a slide upon the screen of her newly awakened mind.

She was in the midst of a large, old-fashioned bed. All the room contained, save a pine bureau, with its pitcher and wash-bowl of thick white ware, and a straight-back chair crudely painted brown.

On the chair her clothes were piled. Sight of them was a stimulus to memory. She recalled riding in the park, her wandering on Scipio through the countryside. Then pausing at crossroads for an agreeable view. That was all.

What had happened? Where was she?

She had no pain. Only slight giddiness, as she stirred in bed. She raised her right hand, cased to the wrist in a cambric nightgown severely plain, and tested properly responsive fingers.

Now she remembered a sudden blast of raucous sound, and a succeeding second, if indeed it was so long, of terrifying uncertainty. She was being thrown. Evidently, she had been hurt, and taken somewhere.

Somewhere in the country. Through the room's

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single window, with a roller curtain pulled part-way down, she could see a sweep of sky, and tree-tops in the distance.

At that stage a human element was injected into the situation. With no knock, or any word of announcement, the door opened to admit a woman in nurse's uniform. A young woman rather heavy and dark, with a great abundance of jet-black hair revealed by her lack of a cap, and a rich red flaming over her cheek-bones.

Crossing to the bed in a businesslike way, she took Leila's wrist between her forefinger and thumb. Judging by the brevity of investigation, it was a satisfactory pulse.

"How do you feel this morning?" she asked.

"A little shaky. But not so badly," Leila replied. "Only I don't understand about things. What happened?"

"There was an accident."

The woman's tone was curtly impersonal, as she busied herself in pouring water from the pitcher into the basin.

"Did you come here with me?"

"I was sent for."

Sponge and towel in hand, the taciturn stranger approached the bed. Leila stopped her with a gesture.

"No, thank you. I need no help in bathing my face. . . . But tell me, please, where I am."

"It's just country. Out in the Bronx."

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"Can I telephone?"

"I don't know if there is a telephone in the house. It's just an old farmhouse."

"Will you find out?" Leila persisted.

She was disturbed by the woman's manner; by what seemed studied unresponsiveness. The more astonishing, therefore, a counter-question:

"Would you like to go home this morning?"

"Very much," said Leila promptly. "If the doctor will let me."

"He isn't here now. But he left word he didn't think it would do you any harm. Not if you felt like it."

"Very much."

Now remembrance of the message about George returned to energize Leila. It had been—how long had it been since she received the message about his injury?

"When was I brought here?" she asked.

"Yesterday."

Only twenty-four hours' delay. But she must notify Mr. Kent at once. When she next spoke she was unconsciously imperious.

"Will you find out about the telephone, please. And, if I can't send for my own car, what you can do about getting me back to town."

"You can see how you feel when you get up," was the woman's only acknowledgment, as she moved to the door.

Left to herself, Leila gingerly put one foot out of

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bed; then the other. And she stood in the middle of the floor, steady enough and clear of head.

"I am lucky," she thought, as she bent in her toilet over the bureau, dismissing the merest suggestion of vertigo. She was hardly dressed when her unknown attendant returned, bearing a tray.

"I see you're up," she commented. "Here's a little breakfast. I guess coffee and toast is all you ought to have, after the knock you got yesterday."

"It's enough, thank you. And how about getting home?"

The woman's attitude became defensive.

"They say there's no telephone. But if you want, you can go just the same."

"Of course I do. But how?"

"There's a taxi in the back yard. The son of the old man that lives here came out in it to see him this morning. He's going back pretty soon. And he says you can go along, too, if you don't mind riding with strangers."

"Tell him I am grateful for the offer," Leila promptly said. "And I'll be ready any time he wants to go."

"All right."

With the same grudging manner, and without a backward look, the woman departed, carefully closing the door.

Wondering a little, Leila took her tray into the sunlight, and began to eat. When she had finished she sat looking at the landscape,—speculating a

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little about her surroundings, and more about George. Her own situation she resolutely excluded. It would come again at night. But she was mistress of her mind by day.

Meditation was brief.

“Are you ready now?”

Her intermediary with the world had entered unperceived, and stood almost at her elbow.

“Surely.”

As Leila rose she noted the woman now wore a raglan coat over her uniform, and a nurse's cap missing before.

“Are you going with me?” she asked.

“The doctor thought I'd better.”

As she followed the few yards to the head of the stairs, and down the broad flight to the front door, Leila heard what seemed a familiar sound. Coming from behind closed doors, it was repeated.

“What's that?” she asked.

“I don't hear anything.”

It was much like the reiterated call of a telephone bell. But Leila's guide did not stop to listen. She led the way outdoors, and by a path round the corner of the house, to where a cab stood under a great elm tree.

A taxi of the familiar black and white complexion. And the usual attitude of a chauffeur at ease, slouching at the wheel. As they approached a man came from a side door of the house, with a backward salutation to someone within, and

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walked toward them. At the last moment he removed his black slouch hat, with an awkward bow.

"Seeing's there's nobody to introduce me," he said, "I'll have to do it myself."

"But I already know you. Your name is Smith."

"Brown, Ma'am," he corrected her.

Leila supplemented her first impression of recognition with an appraising glance.

"But you're the man who came to tell me of Mr. Slayton's accident."

He shook his head.

"I don't like to dispute a lady. But you must be thinking of another man."

Still she was doubtful.

"I don't suppose you have a twin brother?" she suggested.

"No," he replied, and added: "If I did have one, his name would be 'Brown,' too."

"Of course." She was a little vexed with the outcome of her persistence. "Are we ready to go?"

For answer he opened the door of the taxi. Without further comment she stepped in; and after her the woman mysteriously materialized as her attendant. Looking somewhat doubtful, the man reached in to turn down a short folding seat.

"Please don't," said Leila quickly. "You'll find that too uncomfortable in a long ride. And there's really room enough here."

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“Thank you, Ma’am.”

He addressed some remark sotto voce to the chauffeur, and wedged himself in beside the nurse on the farther side. The engine coughed, sputtered, and swung into a steady song. They were under way.

“But I haven’t given you my address,” said Leila, with a sudden thought of omission.

“He knows it.”

Her escort vouchsafed no further explanation. And Leila wondered more. Who were these people so strangely projected into her life? A nurse and a man who offered no clue save the justified assumption that socially he belonged to the lower order.

If they were friends, acquaintances even, they gave no sign. The woman seemed to concentrate on the back of the chauffeur’s head. With his cap pulled down over his eyes the man looked straight ahead. Neither spoke.

The miles ticked off without much change in sketchily perceived landscape. That the stretch of indubitable countryside was surprisingly prolonged came to Leila with the other impression that they were running with needless speed. Pursuing his ball into the highway from an intersecting lane, a boy escaped death under their wheels by the merest hair’s breadth. A second of sickening apprehension, and the little figure was far behind.

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Leila leaned toward the man to dominate with her voice the rattling of the cab.

“Don’t you think the driver is reckless?”

“I guess he knows his business.”

His tone was surly, and his manner no less rude. She half-opened her mouth to remonstrate with the man at the wheel; then reconsidered and sat back, amazed and indignant. It seemed to her the taxi picked up speed. With an especially violent lurch the nurse leaned forward to steady herself by a hand on the rod for wraps.

Falling upon that hand, Leila’s gaze was held fascinated. On the fourth finger was a ruby ring. A ruby set with diamonds. And near its base a black speck. She saw it with that sense of ownership born of long possession. Yet she was half-incredulous.

As she gazed, dumb with astonishment, something drew the man’s attention, breaking his impassive mood. Dull red mounted his face. With a certain deliberation he leaned forward to hurl his words into the nurse’s ear:

“You damned fool!”

Hoarseness of voice emphasized his words. The woman did not shrink from his attack. She gave him glance for glance. And her voice raised in defiance had a metallic ring.

“Who are you speaking to?” she demanded.

“You ——”

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He seemed about to add an epithet, but choked it back, and growled:

“I told you to put it away.”

“I have a right to wear my presents.”

Another exchange of belligerent glances. As the man settled back he added something in a lower tone. Leila did not understand all, but thought his observation ended with,—“in the pickle now.”

With ostentatious deliberation the woman drew her hand back from the rod, and put it in a coat pocket. Nothing further was said, as they raced through a region that seemed to grow more rural, without any sign of approach to the city, or even a town.

Suspicion of her companions, and fear in her situation, grew in Leila's brain. Suspense seemed unendurable. As she leaned to the right the woman presumably a nurse drew back, offering no obstacle as she gripped the man's arm. He turned upon her his silent regard.

“Well?” he seemed to say.

“I do not believe you told me the truth,” she asserted.

“Think what you like,” he answered.

“Stop the cab.”

“What for?”

His face unpleasantly expressed amusement.

“Let me out,” she commanded.

As he made no move, she leaned forward to

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signal the driver. He caught her arm, forcing it back to her side.

"Now sit still," he said roughly.

While panic possessed her, she maintained a firm front. Her voice was still steady as she demanded:

"What do you want?"

"You."

His lips parted in a fierce grin.

"Where are you taking me?"

Still the evil smile. . . . Desperate, Leila struck suddenly to break the glass at the chauffeur's back. That time the woman caught her with a strong grip.

An instant of struggling, and Leila settled back. The enemy was too powerful. Penned in, she took counsel with herself.

She had stepped into a trap. But what was it? It was so blind.

Of one thing she was certain. She no longer doubted her identification of the man as the one sent, he alleged, with a message from George. Now she disbelieved it utterly.

Perhaps George was also a captive. With what motive?

Inevitably her mind, probing feverishly for some clue, swung back to the dreadful charge that, though a verdict was set aside, still stood against her. What could anyone gain by her abduction? If her captors had a hand in the murder of Frank Slayton, why spirit away one already indicted for

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the crime? More persistent than any private search for her would be the seeking hand of the law.

And the ring she felt was surely hers. How had it come to the woman beside her? And she had dared to wear it in her presence. One perplexity upon another. She gave it up.

They were still proceeding rapidly, but at less hazardous speed. Far ahead in a straight stretch Leila saw a limousine approaching. And a second later she noted that violent jolting of the taxi had caused a window to drop slightly.

As the other car came opposite, pulling out a little to pass, she screamed with all her might. A second later came the chauffeur's violent application of more power, and a smothering hand roughly stopping her mouth.

"None of that," the man growled.

She could not tell if her cry was heard in the limousine. At any rate there was no saving pursuit.

Presently the man dropped his gagging hand. With her handkerchief she furiously sought to cleanse her lips from his soiling touch.

"You will be punished for this," she said.

"I'll take care of that. You'd better be good. Or ——"

The rest was ominously left to her imagination. No other word was spoken.

She could only conjecture how long they had ridden when the chauffeur, unprompted from be-

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hind, turned into a driveway flanked at its entrance with tall granite posts surmounted by metal lamps. As they came through Leila saw the sections of a heavy gate swung back.

Straight on they went, bisecting a grassy expanse sprinkled with trees. At the farther end of the lawn stood a gray stone house, a house of imposing proportions, with a wide doorway and portico.

In late autumn seldom a country habitation delights the eye. But in summer, when grass was green, and many birds made music in the trees, it must have been a pleasant spot. In that moment picturesqueness had no place in Leila's mind. She was braced for the next step against her.

Wheeling up to the steps, the driver shut off power. And the black-mustached man promptly alighted.

"Come," he said imperatively to Leila. And repeated his warning: "You'd better be good."

She made no answer as she stood beside him. Last alighted the supposed nurse, still wearing the ruby ring. They went up the steps, a strange trio. A silver plate beside the door-bell drew Leila's attention. She read its engraving:

"The Skurling Sanitorium."

A new thought broke her resolution of silence.

"What do you mean to do?"

No answer. He rang the bell. And in a few seconds he impatiently rang again. Presently the

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door was opened, and a broad-faced colored man looked out.

"I want to see Doctor Maury," the chief conspirator said imperatively.

"Doctor's very busy now," explained the negro.

But he opened the door without further ado. And Leila felt herself urged from behind. The door closed with a click. As they stood a moment in the hall Leila noted the broad black walnut banisters and the black man's shining face.

"This way, Missy."

He addressed Leila, with the negro's instinct for quality, showing his lustrous teeth in a wide smile. Down the hall on the left he pulled back portières, and stood aside for them to enter.

As he disappeared Leila felt the removal of a cheering influence. Certainly, there was nothing to buoy one in her immediate surroundings. The room in which she sat was appropriate to dark deeds. Heavy hangings at its several windows admitted little light. And its sombre furnishings gave out that slightly musty odor concomitant with too much shade and too little fresh air.

No word was addressed to Leila by her captors, who sat together across the room, together, but not on amiable terms. The woman kept a sullen silence, refusing response to the man's attempts at whispered conversation. What he was saying Leila could not hear. But it seemed obvious

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enough that her commitment to this place, a sanatorium, was proposed.

Watching the three, a man of curious appearance stood behind the portières between room and hall. He was tall and slight; of sallow complexion, with deep-set eyes, and cheek-bones threatening to burst the skin. Two perpendicular wrinkles marked the upper terminal of a long, slightly hooked nose. There was something feline in his pose; and his gait emphasized the suggestion, as he noiselessly advanced into the room.

"You wish to see Doctor Maury?" he said in a soft, rather colorless voice.

Three pairs of eyes turned toward him. And the black-mustached man rose with alacrity.

"Yes," he answered. "We have a patient."

"Yours?"

While the doctor's manner was courteous, his tone held a doubt. Leila's captor countered with another question:

"Didn't Doctor Blake telephone?"

"Someone giving that name did," the superintendent of the sanatorium assented.

"Well, he sent me with the woman."

Feeling his way thus far, the man spoke now with assurance, though fidgeting a bit under the doctor's searching look, as he put another question:

"May I ask who you are?"

"Fritz Colahan, plain-clothes man."

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As he swept back his coat lapel a badge appeared in confirmation of his claim.

"Does the patient come willingly?"

"I do not," Leila answered decisively.

As she broke in the doctor turned with a curious arching of his brows. But he said nothing. Again he addressed the man calling himself Colahan.

"I suppose you have the commitment papers?"

"Doctor Blake is getting them."

"Is that it?"

The superintendent turned his back, and gazed at something outside a window.

"Without papers," he said, "I can't keep the woman against her will."

"It's an emergency case," the detective persisted.

"Just how?"

"Let me see you outside."

"Very well," the doctor assented, with momentary hesitation. "Come into the hall."

They conversed in low tones Leila strained to hear. With some of it missed she still overheard enough to reconstruct her abductor's story. She was presented as a woman in New York alone; one from a southern state, and suffering with a delusion that might yield to treatment in absolute seclusion. It was only proposed to confine her in New York pending arrival of relatives from her distant home. Her family were very rich, and would doubtless pay anything within reason.

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Seemingly, this last assurance turned the scale of argument.

"It's very irregular," she heard the doctor say at length. "But I suppose it is all right. I'll make an exception."

On their reëntry the medical man looked at Leila with strictly professional eyes.

"I trust you'll be very comfortable here, Mrs. Chase," he said suavely.

"My name is Slayton."

Leila rose to give battle for liberty.

"Ah, yes."

The doctor's eyes narrowed in appraisal.

"Mrs. Frank Slayton."

"Yes, indeed."

"And if you will listen to reason," she declared with undaunted spirit, "I shall not stay here at all."

"Please be calm, my dear lady."

He sought to lay a soothing hand on her arm. She shook it off impatiently.

"Let me telephone to my lawyer," she urged. "He will confirm what I tell you. These people have brought me here under false pretenses, and against my will."

"I forgot to say," the man Colahan interjected, "that Doctor Blake particularly mentioned she was not to be allowed near a telephone. She has bothered a lot of people about the Slayton case. Just went dippy, you know, over it."

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The doctor looked wise.

"Won't you give me a chance?" Leila pleaded. "I don't ask you to take my word against theirs." Her look at the detective and his accomplice was charged with scorn. "I only ask you to confirm what I say. A serious wrong is being committed. And you may save me from it, if you will send just one call."

The doctor smiled.

"I think you will like us," he said in his silky way, "when you know us better."

She turned away in frigid silence. And her heart was desolate. After months of confinement on a terrible charge, had she secured release only to suffer imprisonment in a lunatic asylum? And the image of Slayton came sharply before her. Was he also victim to these conspirators? She had meant to institute measures for his relief. Now she felt sure they were both caught in tentacles of a criminal enterprise she could not fathom.

Doctor Maury addressed her captors.

"Is special attendance desired?"

"I brought this attendant," the detective quickly replied with a jerk of his thumb toward the dark woman. "Doctor Blake wants her to stay."

"Ah, yes. Miss ——?"

"Shapiro," she said.

"You want connecting rooms, I suppose," the doctor observed. "Please wait a few minutes while I arrange for them."

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He passed from the room with his stealthy tread. Silence reigned after him. Leila felt stunned. And, despite their success, the cause of their altercation on the way to the sanitorium still poisoned mutual feeling of the guilty pair.

Presently there was a slight scuffling in the hall. And past the door came a little white-haired man from somewhere in the rear of the house. Evidently unwilling, he was partly propelled by the muscular arm of an escorting attendant.

"I don't want to go now," he protested.

"That's all right, Mr. Brill." The attendant still urged him onward. "I'll help you."

They passed to diminishing murmurs of expostulation and persuasion. Then Leila heard what seemed to be a distant fall, and a little cry of pain. Shaken, she turned to the man in a last effort.

"Now that you have me here, tell me why you brought me."

"You'll find out in season," he replied with his natural overbearing manner. "That is, if you behave yourself."

"I know the ring."

Leila trembled inwardly as she made the assertion.

"A lot of good it'll do you."

His malevolent glance upon her, he leaned forward suddenly, as if prepared to spring. His voice was rasping now:

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"If you know what's good for you, you'll forget it."

Leila met his threatening glance calmly. Their duel of eyes was interrupted by a white-capped attendant.

"Doctor Blake's patient?" she said inquiringly.

"Here," said Colahan, indicating Leila. "And this is her nurse."

The hospital employee looked at the Shapiro woman somewhat disdainfully, the look of the established for an intruder. Then she turned to Leila.

"This way, please."

"I guess I'll go along," Colahan remarked casually. "Just to see how she is taken care of."

The sanitorium attendant looked doubtful. With seeming carelessness he revealed his detective's shield.

"All right," she said, and took the lead.

Leila came next, her captors evidently proposing to guard the rear. With relief she saw the attendant stop before a door on the second floor, and not far from the head of the stairs. Hope prospered better in close proximity to the ground.

"Here," the attendant said, and entered. "And there," she added, advancing to open a door disclosing a connecting room. "Shall I have the baggage sent up?"

The detective was for the moment nonplussed. But quick wit came to his aid.

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"Haven't got any," he explained. "No time to get it ready. An emergency case, you know."

"I see."

Looking at Leila, the nurse seemed somewhat astonished.

"Well, we can furnish little things needed for a day or two. . . . If you want any help, just press this button."

The Shapiro woman received her closing remark. As the rustle of her starched skirt died away in the hall, Colahan and his feminine follower looked at each other. Then they looked at Leila. A thought of immediate danger flashed through her mind. But they sought at that time only opportunity for conference.

With a turn of her head toward the open door behind her, the woman said,—“In there.”

Colahan stepped to the hall door, closed and locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

"There," he observed, "I guess she's safe for a while."

Following the woman into the connecting room, he closed the door behind them.

Leila took stock of her temporary prison. A pleasant enough room, if one could banish thought of restraint. Two windows gave on a driveway winding up to the house, and the far-stretched meadows beyond.

Then she noted the wire mesh outside each window. Though light, it was strong, and securely

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fastened to the window casing. To unsuspecting eyes it might have seemed only a fly screen. There was no further suggestion of imprisonment.

A bed of dull brass was dressed with pink. And the same shade prevailed in covers of a mahogany bureau. A few chairs of indifferent excellence, and three or four fair prints on the wall. Even an engraving of Litchfield cathedral. A general suggestion of the guest-room in some comfortable suburban home.

With her immediate surroundings fixed in mind, Leila brushed away a fugitive tear, and turned resolutely to the present. Of physical injury, apparently, she need have no fear. Designs against her stopped with restraint. But there was more than abduction afoot in the major scheme. What was it? And did it involve Slayton? If he, like herself, was held a prisoner, he might be in desperate need of aid.

Her thoughts returned to the telephone. Two little minutes on the wire, and forces for relief would be set in motion. There must be a way to manage it, if she were vigilant.

Rising, she moved restlessly about the room. One of the bureau drawers was a little open. She pulled it out, and saw it was empty. Likewise the others, opened to the last one.

Two doors, one in a corner near the bed, and the other two yards or so from the window, next engaged her attention. But she did not immediately

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investigate what lay behind them. For she sensed rather than heard her captors' return. Crossing the room quickly, she stood gazing at the landscape, and did not move as they entered. But she was keenly conscious of their presence, standing just behind her.

"Well," said the man, "I guess I'll be going now."

As Leila did not turn, he addressed her back in a rather conciliatory fashion.

"I'm sorry—Ma'am, we had to do this."

"I trust I shall be sorry for you, when you are punished for it," she replied.

"You needn't worry about that," he snapped back in his usual rough fashion. "Well, good-bye, Rose."

"Good-bye, Fritz."

The door closed behind him. After a minute or so of heavy silence the unwelcome attendant spoke:

"I hope we'll get along together."

"What have I to do with it?"

"A lot."

The friendly inflection caused Leila to turn. It was not a mean face that she saw. Rather one of strong impulses undisciplined. Just then its expression was half-apologetic. And so her language.

"I don't know what you're here for. But it's my job to watch you. You mustn't telephone. And you can't go out. Anything else you can do, if you

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want. You make it easy for me, and I'll try to make it easy for you."

If not dark indeed, the woman's sins would be amply punished in the companionship of Fritz. Leila felt pity for her in a vision of the years ahead. Then came momentary impulse to appeal to her better nature. Dismissed almost as soon as entertained. The detective's grip on her was too strong. Later, perhaps, a way to reach her would offer.

"I don't mean to stay. But we needn't quarrel."

Anger and pride were banished from Leila's voice. And the woman disposed to cushion her captivity responded.

"Call me Rose, please? And if you want me, I'll be in the next room. I'm going to leave you alone a while now."

With a rather apologetic air she locked the door opening on the hall, and dropped the key inside her waist. Then she retired to the connecting chamber.

For a minute or two Leila kept the post by the window, half-expecting her return. But there was neither sight nor sound of her. Emboldened, Leila moved swiftly to the nearer of the previously noted doors.

It was only the door to a closet for the hanging of garments. Before the second door she paused, hopeful but half-dreading. She pushed it back slowly, and saw a little bathroom. Nothing helpful in her predicament was revealed to the eye.

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Well, one might at least bathe. As she removed traces of the morning's wild journey her mind was busy, seeking a way out. Of course there were telephones in the house. There must be an office on the floor below. With luck she might find it, if she could get out of her room.

To take the key by force was out of the question. Deep-chested and strong-armed, Rose was obviously superior in strength.

In stories a note dropped from a window usually brought help. But how could one drop a note through a steel screen? And even if it were possible to do so, a note tossed from a window of the Skurling Sanitorium would probably be picked up by an attendant, and turned over to Doctor Maury. The house stood alone, and so far back from the road that chance of any communication with passers-by was infinitesimal. . . . Hope lay in chance—and the telephone.

With nothing to do but wait, the stern discipline of months in prison came to her aid. "I will be calm," she said, and sent her thoughts,—though not without flashes of painful remembrance, back to days before the Slaytons came to so twist her life. Peaceful days. Would it ever be so again?

Taking its departure, the sun leisurely transfigured low and distant hills. They seemed paved with gold. And two gnarled trees in the foreground were so entwined that they suggested a charging knight in armor.

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Leila did not hear a door open softly. The voice of Rose pierced her introspection.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Ma'am?"

"Only let me out."

The girl's look of distress led Leila to add:

"You don't want to get into trouble, do you, Rose?"

Fear of Fritz seemed still uppermost in Rose's mind.

"I don't want you to be uncomfortable," was all she said.

"I shall be quite all right."

Leila abandoned the overture. With a doubtful look Rose retired again. Twilight came on apace. And Leila switched on a reading lamp. The solitary volume on the table intrigued her. A much-thumbed copy of Emerson's "Essays." It opened to the underlined saying: "There is a crack in everything God has made." Some poor soul in troubled waters had found comfort in comparison.

Now it was dark. Still Leila read on, until she heard the sound of an opened door in the next room, and low-toned conversation between Rose and some woman entering from the hall.

"Here's your patient's supper," the stranger said. "Is she going to the party?"

"What party?"

Rose was manifestly surprised.

"Why, the house party. Regular thing, the first

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of each month. Most of the patients go. Yours ain't violent, is she? "

"No," said Rose, defensively adding, "We've just come."

"Well, it may be a long time before you go," her informant observed cheerfully. "And believe me, when you've been here as long as I have, you'll jump at the chance of a little fun."

The door closed after her. And presently Rose brought in supper. No mention of a party.

With a sharp need of food, after twenty-four hours almost bare of sustenance, Leila turned to typical hospital fare. The tea and prunes, the custard, and bread-and-butter, with a little fish.

In the midst of the repast came a soft knock at the door. And Doctor Maury glided in, with a deferential, "Good-evening."

"I trust we are making you comfortable," he pursued.

He renewed with Leila the impression of something inhumanly remote.

"It's not a bad prison," she said coldly. "When are you going to let me telephone, or do so yourself, to verify my statement that I was brought here by fraud? And that my name is Leila Slayton? "

He bowed deprecatingly.

"I wonder, if you are not too tired, whether you would care to meet some of my—guests this evening."

She looked at him inquiringly.

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"We have a regular monthly gathering," he went on to explain. "I think you would enjoy it. Most of them do. . . . You'd find them nice people. Ladies and gentlemen—you know."

This was better than she had hoped. But still she fenced.

"I have nothing to wear."

"Your trunks haven't come? That really doesn't matter. Your riding habit will do." In his secretive eyes she detected a gleam of amusement. "Some of the others," he finished, "will be in costume."

"I might go for a while. You may imagine this is not amusing to me." She appeared to weigh the suggestion. "I suppose one is properly protected."

Of a sudden his eyes opened wide, like those of a cat. It seemed he sought access to something in her mind.

"You need have no fear," he said.

"Very well, then. I will go."

He received her assent with a bow.

"About eight o'clock I shall count on seeing you."

She heard him give brief instruction in the next room.

"Your patient will attend the gathering in the second floor parlors to-night."

"But ——" Rose began.

"But what?"

He spoke sharply.

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"I have orders to keep her in her room."

"I am the only one to give orders here."

No answer. Rose was silenced, if not convinced.

"You will be relieved from duty," he continued, "between eight and ten o'clock. Ten o'clock sharp. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Doctor," said Rose meekly.

When she entered immediately after, Leila saw signs of perturbation. But she was conquered. Presently she broke the news abruptly:

"The doctor says you will go to the party to-night, Ma'am."

"Yes, he mentioned it to me."

Leila's manner was casual, as she added:

"I'll not need you afterward, if you have something pleasant to do."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Rose's voice was pacific. But her hand sought the key in her bosom.

"I don't think," she said, "I'll be doing anything particular."

With this observation she departed, and steadfastly kept her place in the other room. Leila read on with Emerson. But his philosophy found scant lodgment. Her watch registered seven o'clock. And seven-thirty. While her pulse quickened, time seemed to go more slowly.

On the stroke of eight came a light knock at the door. It was repeated, and the knob turned. Then slowly, and with a certain ceremoniousness, the

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door was opened. Doctor Maury stood there, looking Oriental in evening dress.

“At your service,” he said.

Leila saw the face of Rose, a picture of uncertainty, peering from behind a slightly opened door, as, taking the doctor’s arm, she stepped into the hall.

At that moment two men passed on their way to the stairs. Elderly men arm-in-arm. Short and white-bearded, one was attired in golfing clothes. His companion was tall and thin, with a long drooping mustache. And his spare bow-legs appeared in the knee-breeches of court dress.

“Is Napoleon coming to-night?” asked the stubby one.

“Yes,” the tall man assured him. “And Josephine.”

“Marie Louise is coming, too. Won’t that be capital?”

“‘Capital!’ Right.”

Whereat the tall man slapped his companion on the shoulder. And as they descended the stairs, arm-in-arm, a cackle of thin laughter eddied through the hall.

CHAPTER XIV.

SKURLING REVEALED

WHEN one hunts a murderer it is worse than embarrassing to wonder if he himself is involved in homicide. With that thought pressing upon him Slayton gained but broken sleep. Bad dreams came. He saw Fritz dead, and himself at the bar, a defendant. He stood alone in a skeptical world. For some mysterious reason Leila had deserted him.

But sound slumber came when he had abandoned hope of it. Next time he woke the sun was quite high. Appreciation of that fact immediately preceded sight of a morning paper folded beside him. With the instant thought he reached for it, and turned its pages with feverish interest.

The usual assortment of assaults, burglaries, and homicides, crimes in general. But no word of that midnight encounter from which he had departed in blind haste, fearing the worst.

One first-page head arrested his attention:

*District Attorney
Will Retry the
Slayton Case Soon*

Though he could not reach it on the calendar before election day, the political-minded prosecutor

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meant to make capital with the case before the voters' mob. That was evident in the poisonous insinuation of an interview, with his intimation of powerful interests working on behalf of Leila. . . . And one who should occupy her place in the dock,—either Fritz himself, or someone reachable through him, was about to flee the country.

He had wasted hours with oversleeping, when there was not a minute to spare. Mentally he reproached the captain. But an incarnation of serenity saluted his eyes at the end of a hasty toilet. The captain sat in a purple dressing-gown, like a prelate robed. If he had any occupation but smoking, it was not suggested.

“You promised to call me——” began Slayton half-resentfully. “And didn’t do it.”

The captain raised a mildly restraining hand.

“On second thought,” he said, “I decided not to. You were too near the end of your rope. And evidently there’s stern business afoot. Now a good rest has fitted you to cope with it.”

“No doubt your intention was good. But I’ll be lucky if it isn’t too late. And if that happens ——”

Slayton paused nervously.

“You’ll never forgive yourself,” the captain continued. “And particularly won’t forgive me. But I’ve a wager with myself—I won’t tell it to you now,—that we’re still in season for what’s to be done. I take it for granted your man didn’t get away unscratched.”

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"I fear I killed him."

"Probably you didn't. But I'm delighted to hear he isn't spryly eluding us."

The captain lighted another cigarette.

"You don't smoke before breakfast? I congratulate you. . . . There's your tray. And here," touching himself on the breast, "is your audience. While you get food, give me information."

Slayton went rapidly through the night's events. The captain listened attentively; almost without comment. Now and then he blew a wide smoke wreath, and through it a smaller one. With the end in Slayton's wild ride to the city he rose. And his manner was no longer casual. Into it had entered decisiveness.

"Shall we start now?" he asked.

It was hardly a question.

"Where?"

"Wherever this Fritz happens to be."

Already slipping out of his dressing-gown, the captain reached to press a button. And he put a question as he slipped on his coat:

"Do we have to go to the police for his address?"

"I know the address of a woman said to be his wife. Mrs. Slayton's hair-dresser," George explained.

"Excellent."

The captain reached for his hat and gloves. And that moment the beaming face of Patrick Hallahan appeared, framed in the partly opened door.

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"We're going away, Patrick," said the captain.

"Yes, sir."

After a moment's fruitless anticipation, he mustered courage to ask:

"Where, Captain?"

"I don't know, Patrick."

Unenlightened, Patrick was still not dismayed.

"Shall I pack, Captain?"

"Just get the car. . . . And, Pat ——"

His faithful servitor beamed at the diminutive.

"Look in the car you took to the garage early this morning. Get the license card, if there is one, and any scrap of paper you find in it."

"Now?" inquired Patrick.

"At once."

The captain picked up the thread of his conversation with Slayton, who saw in him another man, alert and masterful. It was the famous hunter who chose to appear a flâneur at home.

"Do you think," he asked, "you could find the way back to the house you were shut up in?"

"Perhaps. But 'twould be more luck than shrewdness. I have only the haziest idea. I count on Colahan, if he is able, making a bee-line for town."

"Likely you're right," the captain assented. "And we have one address to start on. It's my experience the first chance is as likely to be the true clue as the last one. . . . All ready?"

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For answer Slayton stooped to take his street clothes from a chair.

"Have you a revolver?" the captain asked abruptly.

"Not with me."

"A good friend in a pinch."

The captain paused before a strong box, and took a key from his pocket. But he did not use it. After meditative stroking of his chin, he turned to a pistol case on a table near by, and drew therefrom a pair of shining weapons. Sighting one carefully, he passed it to Slayton. The other he dropped into a coat pocket.

"The best American arms," he observed.

"But not quite equal to the French," said Slayton, handling his revolver with the appreciation of an expert.

"Less delicate on the trigger," the captain agreed.

They went on to the stairs. The captain led the way, with momentary pause for a question as he put his foot on the top step:

"Was it a French 38 they used on your brother?"

"The police said so. You remember they lost the revolver after the grand jury indicted. So it wasn't an exhibit at the trial."

"I remember now," said the captain. "A juror shouldn't need the reminder."

Patrick awaited them at the curb. To the cap-

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tain he gave his usual semi-military salute, as he extended a gauntleted hand.

"You found these in the other car?" his employer observed, looking at a card and the superscription of a letter.

"I did, Captain."

Now Slayton was looking at the exhibits with satisfaction.

"They ought to help. Fritz's license card bears the same address given me for Dora."

"Suppose we try that first," the captain suggested. "And what about the letter?"

"'Fritz' of the address must be the old father."

"And 'Bowville, R. F. D. 3' the neighborhood in which you had your surprise party last night. That's in reserve. We may have to deliver Uncle Sam's mail."

They stepped into the waiting car, which started almost before the captain's, "All right, Patrick."

To the casual eye a pair of idle gentlemen off for a ride. Slayton was at first distraught, nervous and somewhat abstracted, thinking of Leila's immediate danger and the great stake for which they played. The captain, on the contrary, seemed in high feather. Danger's proximity was like the aroma of wine to his nostrils. He spoke of adventures with man and beast in the wilds. And sometimes he patted his pistol pocket affectionately.

They reached the street of their destination, and the desired number.

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"Drive around the block," the captain ordered as Patrick turned inquiringly.

If they were correctly informed, Dora, putative wife of the unfaithful Fritz, lived in the middle of a red brick row. Just the dull expanse of a warren appropriate to many of its inhabitants.

"How shall we brace it?" queried the captain.

"I don't know," Slayton confessed. "It wouldn't be natural for me to come with a message to a hair-dresser. And that's all the excuse I can think of now."

"I have it," said the captain. "We are prospective tenants looking for the janitor."

The puzzle of two men by all signs belonging to the upper East Side looking for rooms in a dingy block on the West Side was spared that worthy. For they sat another minute in the car, while the captain heard and answered Slayton's question:

"If we find Fritz here, what shall we use?"

"Force. All that is needed to keep him from getting away. I'm game for consequences."

"All right. I don't want to let you into an unpleasant surprise."

They alighted without further exchange. That moment a man turning in from the sidewalk went rapidly up the steps.

"I say," the captain called in a British manner. "Is this Number 414?"

"See for yourself," the man answered gruffly, inserting his key in the lock of the street door.

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"I am looking for the janitor," the captain explained.

"I don't know of anything to hinder."

The unsociable one vanished within, and the door, drawn by its powerful spring, closed quickly after him.

"Manners," remarked the captain philosophically, "are wasted on the mass. Seemingly, we must hunt the janitor in—What do you call her? Yes,—Dora's flat. She doesn't know you, does she?"

"By sight, maybe. I've a feeling I am spotted everywhere, since the trial. And when I think how much worse it has been for Leila ——"

The captain laid a reassuring hand lightly on his arm.

"I know," he said. "But we're going to get her out of the mess."

"We must. And forgive me for leaning on you. You're tremendously kind. But, after all, it isn't your funeral."

"It may be."

The captain regarded him with a slightly ironic smile.

"Anyway, don't apologize. I have never specialized in philanthropy."

In mutual assent they went up the steps. They sought and found the janitor's bell. And Slayton put a firm finger on the button in sustained pressure.

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"It may be difficult to manœuvre him to Dora's apartment," he reflected. "But I guess it can be managed."

The captain, who had been smoking with unusual vigor, nodded and struck another match.

"Let's have a look at him. Then we can tell if simple bribery is the best policy."

A faint click of the closing vestibule inner door gave notice of the presence of a slatternly woman who evidently had enjoyed some advantage of preliminary inspection. Now she opened the street door the merest bit to address them inhospitably.

"What is it?"

"We are looking for the janitor," the captain explained with his most urbane manner.

"What for?"—snappishly.

"We understand he has an apartment to rent."

"Well——" said the woman grudgingly, and opened the door a bit more.

That moment Slayton strongly gripped the captain's forearm.

"Turn slowly," he urged in a low voice, "and see a man crossing the street just above here."

The captain gave the desired inspection to a man crossing diagonally, with an appearance of leisure, and complete indifference to his surroundings.

"Yes?" he said interrogatively.

"It's Fritz."

Slayton spoke rapidly, and sotto voce.

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"He has recognized me, I think. He was half-way across the street when I noticed him, just as he turned back. I don't think he knows I have seen him."

"Then our cue ——"

"Is to follow him, at a discreet distance."

"All right."

The captain's assent was instant. The next second he turned to the palpably curious woman with a bow.

"Please forgive us for causing you useless trouble. The fact is, my friend has just remembered an imperative engagement. If we come again tomorrow, perhaps you'll be good enough to show us some rooms. . . . Good-morning."

They were down the steps, and had reached the spot where Patrick sat at the wheel before the woman closed the door. Then she stood watching inside, her eyes agog with excitement.

Never looking back, their quarry proceeded with studious indifference to a taxi standing on a corner some two hundred yards away.

"Patrick ——" said the captain.

"Sir," Patrick responded, with his habit of verbal assent to forthcoming orders. In this instance, however, the original purpose was never expressed. For a metred cab came rolling almost noiselessly to a stand just behind them at the curb. Slayton saw it was empty. And pushing the captain before him, he promptly stepped in.

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"I'm engaged," said the driver in somewhat surly fashion.

"To me," observed Slayton.

"Guess again."

Slayton silently extended a ten-dollar note. Its lubrication was conspicuous. At once the driver was mildly obliging.

"That's different. Where to?"

Slayton pointed to the cab Fritz was about to enter.

"Follow it," he directed. "But not so close they know you're doing it."

"You're on."

Fritz entered his taxi with a fleeting look over his shoulder. He saw only the captain's closed car, with Patrick at the wheel, and the cab standing behind it. With an audible slam of the cab door he disappeared. That second the captain leaned out, addressing Patrick.

"Go back to the garage."

"Yes, Captain."

Patrick was obviously flustered.

"And wait at home until I call you. . . . Don't start until we leave."

Continued nodding of a bewildered head showed the order was understood.

The taxi containing Fritz made a half-turn, as if to run past them down the street. And they sat far back to escape observation. But seemingly Fritz changed his mind. For his driver stopped

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abruptly, and backed to straighten out for a run up-town, or a turn at the neighboring corner. Which? If the latter, they might lose the trail, lacking the taxi's number. But it must be risked. For obviously Fritz, knowing himself pursued, would not lead them to the hiding-place of his mistress and the jewels. And that way only could he be reached, pending laborious investigation. And there might be no time for that.

The pursued taxi got under way. And their driver swung easily into line behind it. Not turning the corner, the governing cab went on, straight up-town. Slayton leaned forward, with a sigh of relief, to instruct the chauffeur.

"Get near enough to read the number. Then fall back a little."

The man nodded in reply, with a flick of the finger productive of a little more speed. The taxi ahead was a hundred yards distant; now fifty. There the captain's sharper eyes penetrated its dusty inscription.

"Number 356,281," he read aloud. "You can ease up now, driver."

To Slayton he said:

"I think I understand your reasoning."

The initiative removed from his hands, he relaxed to his characteristic attitude of the philosophic observer. Conversely, Slayton became more incisive.

"It's this," he said. "All we wanted of Dora

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was a clue to Fritz's whereabouts. She isn't in on this criminal game. With all her funny ways, she's straight as they make them. I've heard of her from Leila, and other women I know. They're really fond of her. Since Fritz has appeared, there's nothing she can do to help us. . . . As to dropping your car for the taxi,—Fritz saw it and probably remembers its appearance. Seeing it again would make him suspicious. But a taxi—is just any taxi. With luck we'll trail him to something worth while."

"Exactly," agreed the captain.

A hand in his left coat-pocket withdrew a revolver sufficiently for him to regard it half-tenderly.

"Just count on me," he said, "for anything."

With that assurance came silence. Each wrapped in thought, but keeping half-automatic watch on the car ahead, they sped through the Bronx, on into patchily settled neighborhoods. And still on into the quite open country. Once the captain looked at his watch.

"We're going far," he observed.

The next minute it seemed doubtful. Climbing a slight hill to a little crossroads cluster of houses, their car began coughing. It reached the top, went on a few yards, and stopped.

"What's the matter?" asked Slayton as the driver half-turned from the wheel.

"Gas is out."

"You should have seen to that."

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He spoke sharply. But the chauffeur, having a good defense, chose not to be angry.

"I had enough for town," he replied placatingly. "And how was I to know you wanted to go to the bloomin' border?"

"There's a service station."

The captain's roving eyes had first marked the familiar pump and red sign before a structure squatting by the roadside less than a hundred yards away.

"That's luck."

With the words Slayton was out of the taxi, and proceeding to the rear.

"Let's push her up," he added. "Quick."

With the chauffeur keeping a hand on the wheel, they rolled the car up to the pump. Three, perhaps four, minutes had elapsed since its stopping dismayed them. But with thoughts of Fritz steadily receding down the road the delay seemed tremendous.

An individual in his shirt-sleeves lounged to the door.

"Gas?" he asked disinterestedly.

"Yes. And quick."

"How much?"

He was slowly making the necessary connection.

"All it will hold."

"Enough," said the chauffeur presently. "Make her ship-shape while I try the engine."

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It answered readily enough. And Slayton and the captain stepped in.

"Let's see," said the oil man. "That'll be ——"

"All right."

With mouth agape, he stood staring alternately at the disappearing taxi and the bill Slayton had thrust into his hand.

The pursuit was now furious. Precious minutes lost had given Fritz a lead of miles. Had he kept a straight course? They must trust to luck.

"I guess there are no speed regulations out here," was Slayton's only suggestion to the driver. "Straight ahead, unless I tell you to turn."

After a considerable level stretch they came to a valley, in which another highway met their road at right-angles. Along it came another car as they rushed down the slope. Interest in it vanished with a glance. It was only a runabout bearing lovers.

Soon, for the taxi was extended to its utmost, they reached a considerable growth of scrub pines. In the midst of it two roads converged, with the main highway on which they ran cutting straight through. Slayton's observation that they were little travelled was gleaned in the second or two of his further impression that by the narrowest margin they had missed removing the bridle of a brown horse coming from the left.

On and on they went. Two cars they overtook and passed. But not a taxi. A half-hour had

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elapsed when Slayton's eyes met those of the captain in a mutual thought. Leaning forward, he rapped on the glass behind the driver, who half turned his head, with some abatement of speed.

"We'll stop now," he directed.

A convenient place was soon reached. The grassy approach to a pasture afforded fair parking space. There Slayton and the captain took counsel, while the driver examined sorely tried machinery.

"We must have passed him a long way back," said the captain.

"Yes. It was our rotten luck that he turned off," Slayton agreed. "I suppose the next thing to do is to hunt for Bowville, R. F. D. 3. I haven't the slightest idea which way it is."

"Well, we can ask," the captain offered philosophically. "And I hear someone coming now."

The honk of a horn, with the waxing volume of approach, came from no great distance. Lighting his pipe, the captain took a stand by the roadside. A runabout came bustling into view, and he stopped it with a casual seeming gesture. His question was without mark of special concern:

"We're looking for Bowville. Can you give us a hint?"

"Sorry," explained the spectacled man at the wheel. "I never travelled this way before."

"Let's stand pat, and try once more," suggested the captain, quite unruffled. "As I recall, there

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are more people on the road than living beside it."

The next passer-by was posted. It was a farmer perched behind a fat and dawdling nag.

"Bowville? Yes, I can tell ye."

He reflectively pulled a chin-whisker.

"First turn to the right," pointing with his whip down the road. "Then the second left. It's quite a piece in, with an old barn on the corner lot. Then if you go on about five miles, I calc'late you'll be in the neighborhood you're a-looking for."

They followed directions; even exceeded them. Then Slayton was smitten by doubt, which proved unjustified.

"You're headed right," a man chewing a straw, and leaning hard on a rail-fence, assured them. "Who you lookin' for? Fritz Colahan? Well, just take the next right, and drive straight as you can right into his dooryard. . . . No, it ain't very near. Maybe five miles. Just happens I know him."

On again they hastened, with the dust of country roads billowing deep behind them. As their final informant had promised, they drove at last straight across a skirting turnpike, into the desired dooryard. Their driver applied his brake in accentuation of the final jolt.

To Slayton the place had no associations by daylight. Undecided as the captain, he viewed the unpromising premises. The house seemed tenant-

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less as they stopped by the wide veranda, and stepped from their cab.

Slayton raised the big knocker of the front door, and let it fall. With its loud peal each dropped a hand into his pistol pocket. Presently slow footsteps were heard, and the door was opened.

An old man of benevolent aspect regarded them over steel-rimmed spectacles. He was weather-beaten; and his dress proclaimed the farmer.

"We're looking for Mr. Colahan," explained Slayton.

"I'm Colahan."

"Fritz Colahan?" the captain supplemented.

"He's my son," said the old man cordially.

"Glad to see you. Come right in."

"If he isn't here, we won't wait," Slayton suggested, as they reached the hall. "We're in rather a hurry."

"Can't you set down? Now, that's too bad."

The old man was plainly disappointed. An idea came to him as he pushed the spectacles high on his nose.

"Maybe one of you is the feller Fritz left the address for."

"Oh, did he?" said the captain quickly. "That's just it."

They watched with masked anxiety his examination of the contents of a vest pocket. A bit of tobacco, a piece of string; also a large safety-pin, and a penny. And a folded scrap of brown paper

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he handed to the captain. Four words were scribbled on it;

“*Cadiz. Braun’s Wharf. Tuesday.*”

“Thanks,” said the captain. “Has he been gone long?”

“Left with his wife, quite a while ago. Happen you know anything about the prisoner he’s going to South Ameriky for?”

“If we get there in time, we may save him the trip.”

“I want to know.”

Old Colahan followed them into the yard.

“Sorry you can’t stay for a bit,” he said hospitably.

Roving casually, Slayton’s eyes lighted on a little square of linen. Half-concealed by a handful of late hay, it lay there, almost under the running-board of the taxi. Picking it up, he instinctively applied it to his nostrils.

The perfume it carried went straight to his brain. He looked for marking. “L. S.” embroidered in a corner.

“Was anybody else with your son, when he left this morning?” he asked sharply.

“It’s funny you ask.” Old Colahan looked his surprise. “As a matter of fact, there was. A young woman I kept over night. Far’s I could make out, her horse threw her a piece up the road, yesterday. And I picked her up.”

“Do you know her name?”

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“No. She wa’n’t conscious yesterday. And I didn’t see her this morning.”

“What did she look like?”

In his anxiety Slayton grew dictatorial. But old Colahan was nowise offended. Only puzzled, and anxious to please.

“I ain’t much of a hand,” he apologized, “at describing women. “But she was pretty formed. About medium height, I guess. Lots of right pretty reddish hair. And eyes sort of green. Good looking, she was.”

“Where did Fritz take her?”

“Why, she told him where she lived, he said. And he was takin’ her home. I don’t know where it is. There was too much to think about, with all the rest. If I was to tell you of all the queer doings here last night ——”

A peal of the telephone bell checked his confidence. With, “Excuse me, please,” he disappeared in the direction of its summons. But a comfortable looking housewife continued to regard them from a doorway at the farther end of the hall.

“Well?” the captain queried when old Colahan was at a safe distance within doors.

“It’s Leila’s handkerchief. And she is in Fritz’s hands.”

“That’s jumping to a conclusion.”

“Do you think he would overlook a chance like that?”

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"From what you tell me of him, probably not," the captain admitted.

"She was here last night. And I never knew it."

"You've no reason to reproach yourself for that. It's only in plays and stories, you know, that men have that psychic sense of the unseen. As I recall, you arrived unconscious, and left in a good deal of a hurry."

"But somehow I should have known," Slayton insisted. "Since I didn't, they've got her. And the first thing for us to do now is to find her."

"Yes, Fritz would count on that."

The captain tapped a cigarette reflectively.

"So to speak, if you'll pardon the expression, she is the herring drawn across his trail."

"That isn't going to stop me. I'll have her back to-day. And if he hurts her ——"

"He'll be punished enough, if the state gets him for murder."

Apparently taking counsel from the sky, the captain proceeded to a question:

"Shall I talk to the old boy a bit when he comes back?"

"While I ——?"

Slayton caught the suggested idea midway in his counter question.

"Yes, I see what you mean. If old Colahan will let me, I'll telephone our house."

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"We may as well make sure she is lost before we start hunting for her."

The sound of heavy boots on bare boards gave warning of the old farmer's return. Hurrying, half-shuffling, and rather out of breath, he appeared in the doorway.

"I didn't expect to be so long," he said apologetically. "It was Fritz on the telephone. And he had quite a lot to say."

"Don't apologize," said the captain. "We've been having a little chat."

"I told him you'd come."

"You did?"

Slayton's question had rather the accent of an exclamation.

"Yes. Are you the feller he expected?"

The captain was addressed.

"As a matter of fact," he said easily, "I'm not. I came for him."

"That's what Fritz thought. I told him what you looked like, and he said he didn't recognize you."

"Couldn't he guess who I was?" asked Slayton.

"He didn't try, because I didn't describe you to him," explained the farmer, adding half-apologetically, "I thought you just come along for company. And it was hard talking. Lost him twice. He didn't finish all he wanted to say. But he's coming out to-night, if he can get here."

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“Too bad we can’t wait. . . . Where is he now?”

The captain’s voice had the proper shading of regret. Old Colahan rose to the bait.

“In Faunceton. Sure you can’t wait? I’d admire to have you stay for supper.”

“Sorry we can’t. The fact is, I’ve already missed an engagement,” said Slayton, adding apparently in afterthought: “Could I use your telephone a few minutes? It may be I can pick the party up later.”

“Help yourself. It’s right at the end of the hall. Turn left into the little closet there. Hope you have better luck than I did.”

As he entered the house the last words Slayton heard were the captain’s:

“Let’s see. About how far did you say it was to Faunceton?”

The telephone was easily found. But minutes elapsed before he realized it was an old-fashioned instrument without the automatic call. He turned a handle vigorously, and was agreeably astonished by the operator’s prompt response. The way seemed smoothed, the machinery oiled for him. So soon he was not even moved to examine his watch he heard the droningly propounded question:

“Trying Pla-za ——? There’s your party!”

“No,” said a servant answering. “Mrs. Slayton is not at home.”

“Can you tell me when she will be?”

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“ I can’t say, sir.”

“ May I speak with her maid? ”

There followed a moment of silence, and the impatient explanation :

“ This is George Slayton speaking.”

“ I beg your pardon, sir.”

The voice at the other end of the wire suddenly changed. Now it was saturated with desire to please.

“ A moment, sir. I will call Marie at once.”

A brief pause, with stray murmurs of intercepted voices, and the familiar inquiry,—“ Did you get your party? ” of the girl at the switchboard. His mind snapped back with the first syllable of eager salutation :

“ Oh, Mr. George! ”

He stopped her with a curt question :

“ Where is your mistress, Marie? ”

“ We do not know, sir. Not since yesterday.”

“ Have you no message? ”

“ No, sir. Madame went riding. But she did not return. All night I waited. And the horse ——” He sensed her struggle for control of breath, as she resumed : “ Carlin says the horse is found.”

“ There must have been an accident.” He tried to speak cheerfully. “ We’ll find her.”

“ And will you find her soon? ”

Her voice supplicated.

“ To-day, I think,” he answered confidently.

As he hung up the receiver he heard her half-

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whispered petition to the good God. In the yard he found old Colahan with one foot on the running-board of the taxi, talking to the captain, who was comfortably seated within.

"Did you have good luck?" he asked amiably.

"I found out what I wanted to know. But I'll have to hurry to get anything out of it. It's later than I thought."

"The days are gettin' pretty short." Old Colahan removed his foot from the running-board, and shaded his eyes for a better observation of the westering sun.

"Well, good luck to you. Sorry you couldn't stay longer."

Evidently not one who clung to farewells. With these words he turned to the barn.

Slayton spoke first, as they crossed the highway at the foot of the yard:

"It seems rotten to treat the old man so."

The captain selected, and carefully tapped a cigarette.

"If Fritz were like his father, we'd have to hunt another candidate for the chair," he remarked. . . . "I suppose Mrs. Slayton is missing?"

"She has not been seen since she went riding yesterday."

"Then Fritz didn't take her home. He has hidden her somewhere. The sooner we get him, the better for everybody. Except him," the captain corrected

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himself, and leaned forward to the driver: "Speed, please." To Slayton he resumed:

"I understand this is the only road from here to Faunceton. And Colahan says it runs so straight we can't lose our way."

"Then if Fritz is on it, we get him."

With nodded assent, the captain wrapped himself in seemingly dreamy silence. And Slayton was busy with his thoughts, as the taxi rattled on with much dust, and jolting that was no inducement to conversation. Mile after mile they rode thus, with occasional quickening to vigilant attention as they drew up on some motor ahead, or saw, with its kindred dust cloud, a car advancing to meet their own. Always it was a false alarm.

Until, just past a corner by which the road-makers had skirted a ledge thatched with scrub oak and vines, they came upon a taxi parked a few yards in from the roadside. It was on Slayton's side. And he anticipated the captain in discovery by a few seconds. Just long enough for him to lean forward with a command for their driver to stop. He obeyed with alacrity in a wedge-shaped patch marking the intersection of their humble highway with a smooth macadam road.

They had reached an artery of travel. What of human life was near by remained to be seen. For the nonce no sight of man or habitation greeted the eye. As they started back to the seemingly

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abandoned car swift autumn twilight was darkening the sky.

"A sweet spot for a crime," said the captain meditatively.

Each tightened his grip on his revolver as they turned into a gap in a stone wall. Part behind it, and just off wheel tracks with goldenrod growing abundantly between them, the taxi of problematic interest stood, unoccupied and with quiet engine.

The captain stood guard as Slayton, striking a match to aid his eyes, stooped to read its number in the failing light:

"Number 356,281."

He read it aloud, and straightened up.

"Now where is Fritz?"

There was no answer to their question, as they turned in deliberate survey, keeping back to back. But just then came a twinkle of light in the thin screen of neighboring trees.

"Perhaps one of us," said the captain, "had better wait here. If he jumps us in the dark, it's a slim chance."

For answer Slayton lifted the hood of the car, and busied himself briefly with its machinery.

"Now there's a nice little problem of adjustment," he observed, dropping the hood again. "If he gets away with that in a hurry, he's a miraculous machinist. And that goes for the taxi driver, too, if he still has one. . . . Come on."

No adventure marked their cautious progress

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through the grove. They came suddenly to its farther edge, and saw what was beyond. A little clearing that made a nearly complete circle, bisected by the turnpike. And a few flimsy seeming houses, with somehow the air of things dropped casually, and left where they stood. Behind those on the opposite side of the road trees rose in a thick rampart against the fast paling sky, in which already widely scattered stars shone whitely.

The light they had first seen came from a structure on the left, some fifty yards perhaps, and set a slight distance back from a footpath threading its way through fringing grasses. As they looked a form was outlined against the luminous patch of an uncurtained window. Broad and coatless, it gave them no concern.

“What do you think ——?” the captain began, and paused.

Fate came to their rescue in momentary indecision. A man emerged from a little house almost directly opposite, and walked toward them across the road. They stepped back into the protecting shadows. He passed in the direction of the building under observation. It was unquestionably Fritz.

He entered, and they saw him in evident colloquy with the shirt-sleeved individual first beheld. On creeping a few yards nearer, they noted a counter between the pair, and had a glimpse of shelves with

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many bottles. Evidently some sort of wayside shop.

The man behind the counter pointed to a swinging door, through which Fritz disappeared. As they looked about there was no sign of any person stirring abroad. And the shopkeeper seemed busy with some task before him. They moved hastily forward, to a spot under a window near the back of the building. And listened, straining to catch any sound.

For a minute or so they heard only their beating hearts. Then the voice of Fritz, giving a telephone number. The operator evidently made a mistake at first. So he repeated emphatically,—“4095.”

“Yes,” he said presently. “Is this Skurling?”

A brief pause.

“I want to speak to Rosie Shapiro. . . . Yes, she is.”

Someone was denying knowledge of Rosie, it seemed.

“A new attendant,” Fritz explained. “Just came to-day. Look her up, will you? I want to speak to her.”

More delay. They heard him moving uneasily, the shuffling of feet, and rapping of knuckles. At last Rosie came. They knew that by Fritz’s rebuke.

“Why didn’t you come, as I told you to?”

Listening to her excuse, he was somewhat mollified, but still not amiable.

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"I suppose if the doctor was there, you couldn't help it," he grumbled. "Any trouble with her?"

Rosie seemed to offer a good report, and a suggestion.

"I guess that'll be all right," Fritz agreed, after a moment's consideration. "They won't let her get away. And it'll be easier for you to slip out. Say about half-past nine. Don't fail now. And the same place,—right at the corner of the lane."

Rosie had only time for expression of assent. Then Fritz broke in again.

"I got to rustle along now. That feller in town may be cookin' up trouble for us. But I guess we've got him spiked while we hold his girl. He knows she's gone. I left word where he lives for him to call her house this mornin'. . . . It's up to you, Rosie, to keep him runnin'. Be good, and you'll wear diamonds. So long."

His emphatic hanging-up of the receiver closely preceded his return to the front of the shop. As if in haste, he paid the charge, and left. Stooping low, they watched him down the path up which they had come.

"What do you think?" the captain asked softly.

"Leila first," said Slayton. "We know his plan for a getaway. And pretty closely where he expects to be meantime. With her out of harm's way, there'll be nothing to hamper us."

"My idea, too," the captain assented. "Well, let's try the shop."

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Standing on tiptoe, they looked in. Cases of confectionery, cigarettes, cigars, pipe tobacco. Shelves holding varicolored jars; compartments labelled; odds and ends; even a machine offering one's correct weight for a penny. A country drug-store. Whence came its business?

Keeping their heads low, they edged their way to the sidewalk. Had they been observed, which was not the case, the uncertainty of their demeanor would have caused less comment than they supposed. They paused at the doorstep.

"The thing to do," said the captain, drawing inspiration from an empty case, "is to buy cigarettes."

"Of course," Slayton agreed. "Druggists know everything."

As they entered the proprietor was busy counting white pills, with which he filled a little bottle. A thick-set, ruddy-faced man, with bushy gray brows and twinkling eyes. He kept them waiting until his count was complete. Then he came to serve them with a hitching step.

"Do you know a place called 'Skurling'?" asked Slayton, as the cash-drawer clanged its announcement of sale.

"Sure," said the druggist.

"Can you direct us to it?"

The druggist looked from Slayton to the captain, and back again. His eyebrows were working comically.

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“What’s the joke?” he asked.

“No joke at all,” offered the captain. “Isn’t it a simple question?”

The druggist retreated a little, to get a better barrier of show-case. Thus fortified, he indulged in sarcasm:

“Don’t you know the way home?”

They stared at him in honest amazement.

“Can’t you find your way,” he continued, “around the corner of this store, and up a lane?”

“Is that where it is?”

So early an end to their quest seemed unbelievably good luck.

“Do you mind telling us,” pursued Slayton, “what it is?”

The druggist’s eyebrows were again convulsed.

“Some,” he said, “call it a ‘nut factory.’ Maybe they’re right.”

With this parting shot he went hitching forward to serve an urchin standing covetously before the candy counter. The boy shrank into a corner as Slayton and the captain strolled out. Apparently, Skurling was a sanitorium. And they were taken for two of its inmates. Was Leila there, detained as a patient?

“Why not brace it?” Slayton suggested. “The druggist wasn’t astonished to see us out. Then it should be possible to get in.”

“Let’s see how ——” said the captain.

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Slayton's stick rang sharply on the wall by which they stood.

"I have it. You're the doctor. And I'm the patient. Quite evidently it's one of those nervine places. . . . That's enough to go on, isn't it?"

"For me."

With the prospect of immediate action the captain grew animated.

"Now let's spot the place, and get our taxi. It won't do for patients to arrive out here on foot."

Skurling was easily discovered with the given clue. They gathered it must be the large house easily seen, and for a place of that sort surprisingly illuminated,—once they had crossed the front of the store and rounded a clump of alders, with a great bill-board standing behind. There was a gate with quite the look of the entrance to a gentleman's estate, and a driveway winding into the dusk beyond.

"Better keep to the turnpike," Slayton suggested as they turned back. "It's less risk, since we don't want to meet Fritz just now. If he isn't a crack mechanic, or his driver clever with machinery, likely enough he's still around."

They saw their taxi waiting, its tail-light marking the intersection of roads. As they came up their driver stretched and yawned.

"Quite a stay," he observed.

"And going to be longer."

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Slayton thrust a bank-note into his half-open hand.

"We want you," he explained, "to drive us up the road, past the store you'll see, and into the driveway leading to a house just beyond. You leave us there and come back here to wait. Can't tell how long it will be. Get some lollypops, ice-cream soda,—anything to keep you from starving, in the drug-store. But be ready when we come.

. . . Do you understand?"

The driver pulled down his cap.

"I get you. This is my stand."

"And it's a good idea," the captain added, as they stepped into the cab, "to keep headed for town."

A short ride indeed. They seemed hardly under way when they stopped at a door. They looked out upon the ample outline of a mansion. For a sanatorium it was indeed well lighted. Almost a gay place.

The door-plate reassured them. Under "Skurling Sanitorium" they read the name of "Doctor Maury." Thus armed, they rang the bell. A beaming colored man presently responded.

"I'd like to see the doctor," the captain observed, with what he took to be a professional manner.

"Yes, sah." The door opened wide to admit them. "Doctor's busy just now. They's a party to-night." The negro grinned broadly. "I'll call him."

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They had only a few minutes to wait. But short as it was, time sufficed for a surprise. A half-suppressed giggle drew attention to a gray-haired woman in baby-blue, standing in the doorway. With a simper, and a little courtesy, she tripped away into the shadows.

"I trust you won't have to put me under lock and key," observed Slayton.

"Not if I can help it."

The captain had recourse to the inevitable cigarette.

"Meantime, let me prescribe silence. In a place like this I've a feeling the very shadows have ears."

That at least was true of one moving silent as a shadow. Doctor Maury had them under observation, again watching from behind the portières, before they were aware of his presence.

"Doctor Blake?"

Rising in surprise, the captain turned and bowed.

"I suppose you've come about the woman who thinks she is a Slayton?" the doctor continued.

That moment with the captain was one of inspiration.

"It happens," he said with his slightly melancholy air, "that I've come not only to arrange about her, but to place another patient in your hands."

"I see."

First Doctor Maury looked at Slayton, then back to the captain, inquiringly. The recipient of his

SKURLING REVEALED

first scrutiny rose, and strolled into the hall. The captain could better sustain his brilliant start, if left alone.

It was very interesting, he heard the doctor say, to note the number of those temporarily unbalanced by reports of sensational murder trials. Was his man apt to be violent? "Oh, no," the captain said. He only needed rest; quiet, and soothing influence; which, he added, appeared to be all necessary in the case of the woman admitted earlier in the day. As to the female patient, at least, Doctor Maury agreed.

"Would you not," he inquired, "like to see her? And make a little inspection of my method of treating nervous cases? I'm a believer in music, and generally in simple recreation."

The captain looked at his watch—doubtfully.

"If it doesn't require much time," he assented.

"Just up-stairs," urged Doctor Maury, as Slayton reëntered the room. "We are having our regular fortnightly party."

"Are you game for a party, George?"

Slayton did not look at the captain. He studied the rug, and took a full minute to answer.

"I don't mind," he said at last. "But I won't go," with sudden vigor, "if doctors are going to ask me foolish questions."

"No one shall bother you," the doctor assured him with a syrupy accent. "This way please."

He drew back the portières for them to step into the hall.

CHAPTER XV

A DASH IN THE DUSK

FROM the young man with a beard pointed and softly brown, and eyes blue as violets that open to the morning sun, Leila withdrew a step, evading the hand he would have laid upon her arm.

"If you will only tell me your trouble," he urged, "I will cure you."

"But you see," she protested, "I haven't any."

"That's what makes my work hard."

He shook his head indulgently.

"You see, that is what I am really here for. To heal the sick. Doctor Maury knows it. When I explained it, he got the idea at once. But somehow the others cannot understand. Perhaps it's the costume."

He looked down at his patent leathers and perfectly pressed trousers.

"Would you like to see me," with an eager catch of breath, "as I was in the most famous incarnation? In robe and sandals?"

"Your name is DeVinne, and you come from Brooklyn."

A rasping voice over her shoulder arrested the declination on Leila's lips. Without further

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speech, and only a mildly reproachful look, the professed healer walked away.

Turning to thank her rescuer, Leila was not greatly cheered. Short and swarthy, with sunken cheeks and a leathery skin, his bright black eyes peered sharply from under the brim of a big brown derby. And he wore a brown top-coat buttoned to the chin, with dogskin gloves. Mild as the night was, with artificial heat indoors, Leila had found the room oppressively warm.

"Do I address Diana?" he asked, removing his hat with a jerky bow.

"Oh, I'm not so famous."

She managed a propitiating smile.

"Then you are ——?"

His accent was insistent.

"Leila Slayton."

In her nervous concern with surroundings she reduced her name to bald identification of the daily press.

"You don't so much look the part."

A new sparkle in his eye, he surveyed her with a certain maliciousness.

"And you?" she said.

"Why, I'm the one he said he was!"

"You mean ——?"

"S-sh! Not so loud. A lot of people here are a little off. And I don't know what they might do to me, if they found out about it."

His head turned in a rapid, stealthy survey.

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“ See that man at the piano? ”

The individual indicated was young and stout, with puffy cheeks and an unwholesome, beardless look.

“ He thinks he’s Nero.”

Leila’s mentor quivered with his smothered laughter. And Nero, playing a movement of the “ Moonlight Sonata ” in ironic contrast to weird fancies seething in the air, finished with the ease of a virtuoso, and looked about. Finding himself ignored, he cupped his chin in his hands, and stared moodily at the keyboard.

“ And there’s Mary, Queen of Scots.”

Another jerk of the thumb toward a small blonde with a jewelled head-dress, who sat talking sedately with the elderly spindle-shanks first beheld by Leila as she left her room.

“ Bah ! ”

The little man with the brown derby waxed venomous.

“ I hear there’s a new one to-night that thinks he is your brother-in-law,” he observed sardonically.

“ Where is he? ”

Inexplicable hope was born that instant in Leila’s breast.

“ Look at that. Sir Walter Raleigh. Hah ! ”

He touched her elbow, directing attention to a man of grave demeanor and rather courtly aspect, pacing up and down the hall.

“ And George Slayton—where is he? ”

A DASH IN THE DUSK

"I didn't say it was 'George.' "

He corrected her with unexpected sharpness.

"But you said it was my brother-in-law."

"Now I know your trouble. You read the newspapers."

He wagged his head magisterially.

"But where is he? "

Irrepressible anxiety made her urgent—too urgent, it seemed.

He set out to soothe her.

"Come with me—and I'll tell you my secret. There's a corner over there where no one will hear us."

"After I see this Slayton."

"Well," he grumbled, "come along. But it's silly."

As they began threading their way through the strangely feverish company, Doctor Maury came toward them from the first of the double parlors. He moved like a spirit, with a certain stealthy ease. As he passed Leila had a lightning glance from his strangely green and enigmatic eyes. That instant her guide's bumptiousness evaporated. He seemed to diminish, and shrank behind her.

They went slowly, looking to right and left, and crossed the threshold. Of a sudden something drew Leila's eyes as a magnet. Half-a-head above the crowd about him, Slayton came toward her, removing obstacles with uncomprehended murmurs of apology. She gained a minute for him by delib-

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erate inspection in the opposite direction, and only turned at the sound of his voice.

“This is an unexpected pleasure.”

“And I,” she answered, “hardly expected to find you here.”

“Have you a few minutes for me?”

“I think so—if Mr.”—she turned to the little man with the brown derby, “will excuse me.”

“I haven’t told you my secret,” he protested, fretful as a child.

“Nor I mine,” said George. “Won’t you,” urbanely—“give me the right of way for a few minutes? You see, I’ve just come.”

“Well,” the little man agreed, visibly pleased by such deference, “for just a few minutes I will. I’ll be waiting here.”

They turned away with a nod of thanks.

“How did you get here,” she asked, as Slayton cleared their path to the hall.

“S-sh!” he warned her. “I’ll explain later. Were you brought here as a patient?”

“Yes.”

“So was I. . . . We’re leaving at once.”

“How?” she whispered.

Her heart fluttered uncontrollably.

“You’ll see.”

They had reached the hall now, with the stairs but a few yards distant. With slight pressure upon the hand on his arm there he checked her. And she heard him say:

A DASH IN THE DUSK

"Mrs. Slayton, may I present Captain Clifford?"

"Otherwise," said the captain, as he stepped from a corner, "the 'Doctor Blake' supposedly responsible for both of you here."

"But not actually, I trust."

"No. Fact is, I'm here to take you away."

"Then you have our gratitude."

Of their little colloquy Slayton was the spectator; and thought of the photograph that was the image of Leila's youth sharpened his scrutiny. But their demeanor was impeccable. The simplest courtesy on both sides, and appreciation of proffered service on the part of Leila. And yet he said:

"You know, somehow, for a moment I thought you two had met before."

The captain bowed with graver courtesy.

"It was not my good fortune."

Scarlet came to the paleness of Leila's cheeks.

"Of course," she said, "I remember seeing the captain."

Contrition made Slayton brusque.

"I think the way is clear," he observed taking a step forward. "You'd better appear as the escort, Captain."

No one met them on the stairs. And the lower hall seemed empty. As swiftly as possible, while avoiding the appearance of a fugitive's haste, the men recovered top-coats and hats from a closet in which they had seen them hung.

IN THE TENTH MOON

"What are you leaving?" Slayton hurriedly asked Leila.

"Nothing of consequence," she answered.

"All right. You'll have my coat when we get outside. Now—quickly."

They had taken two, perhaps three steps when a woman's scream rent the air. And there followed at once a babel of excited voices above.

As Slayton, leading, reached for the door a dark form rose from the shadowed corner before him, barring the way.

"What for?"

It was the colored doorman.

"Get out of the way."

The negro braced himself against the door.

"Can't leave, sah, 'thout the doctor's permission."

With a panther-like motion the captain reached him, the small, cold barrel of his revolver pressed against a shrinking stomach.

"Open the door."

That usually gentle voice had the edge of steel and the chill of ice.

"For de Lawd's sake!"

"For your sake. Quick!"

Footsteps drew nearer above. The trembling negro made haste to open the door, and stepped aside for them to pass.

"You first," the captain ordered.

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"Have mercy on a poor niggah," the doorman whined.

For answer the menace of the revolver muzzle, pressed hard against his back.

"All right, Cunnel. Don't be careless like. I'll go."

A moment later they were outside, with the door softly closed behind them.

"Forward, you black trash," the captain said fiercely. And to Slayton:

"You go on with Mrs. Slayton. I'll bring up the rear."

In that order they went on swiftly, and silently, save for the negro's inarticulate whining. There was no pursuit. Seemingly, their departure had passed unnoted in the excitement of some mishap signalled by the scream they had heard.

Looking back once, Slayton saw figures passing hurriedly before second story windows, and thought they seemed like attendants rounding up the patients. It also came to mind that it was near the time appointed for Fritz's rendezvous with Rosie. And he took a firmer grip on the butt of his revolver.

They turned right from the lane, and hurried past the little drug-store, dark for the night. As they neared the junction of roads the captain found and softly blew a whistle. Promptly their chauffeur rose from the ground by the wall, briskly professional as he tossed away his cigarette.

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"Yes, sir."

"Is the car all right?" asked Slayton.

"Sure. She's right ready."

He stepped in, and stooped with deft motions. The headlights glowed. The motor hummed.

"Right," said the captain, and swung open the door.

Transferring his revolver to a pocket of his sack coat, Slayton extended the warmer garment to Leila, with a curt request: "Put this on."

She silently complied. Standing beside the taxi, by a gesture he mutely invited her to enter. Now he turned to the captain, who punctiliously declined.

"After you," he said. "And let me attend to this."

"This" was the cowering negro, whose attitude supplicated as the captain's hand went to his breast pocket. It came away with something extended.

"Try this, George. It's not bad."

The suppliant accepted a cigar with open-mouthed wonder.

"And here's something for your trouble. I'm sorry we had to be a little rough."

A bank-note passed from the captain's hand to a black one half-incredulously extended. The captain's tone was mildly conversational.

"Don't you think," he asked, "you might sit down on this rock, and smoke the cigar while we get a little start. It won't hurt you any with the

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doctor. You can say we carried you away. Don't you think so? "

"Suah, Cunnel."

The negro widely smiled.

"I guess dis yere's all right."

"Thank you, George."

The captain stepped into the taxi.

"Now hustle for the city," Slayton directed the chauffeur. "We'll give you further orders later."

Two or three minutes of painful alertness for the two men watching beside Leila. Then they were past the entrance to Skurling, without even the interruption of a hail. And they relaxed, still silent. Thus they rode, as the industrious metre ticked off miles intervening between country and the glow marking New York's night horizon.

At length Leila broke the ice with her remark sounding, somehow, strained:

"I think it's high time we thanked you."

"And I, you—for the opportunity," returned the captain urbanely.

"But how did you find me? "

Waiting a moment for Slayton to come in, the captain sought to unseal his lips.

"Let the commander tell you," he said. "I'm only a helper in the expedition."

"Nonsense."

George turned with a hint of impatience from scrutiny of the ribbon of road before them.

"I couldn't have done it without him. And you

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may thank him for being found so soon. . . . But it's a longish story. Hadn't you better rest now? "

Silence again—almost unbroken. With remarks few and trivial, occasional commonplaces of inquiry about comfort, and the like, they rode through dark suburbs, on into better lighted streets. At last they entered the stronghold of fashion, and directed their driver to old Jabez Slayton's door. On either side of the broad steps a lion rested with lowered head on its paws. Unquestionably asleep.

They went slowly up to ring the bell. Presently the great door opened—cautiously. Carlin was still up. A little dishevelled, and at first more than a little outraged. But his expression changed to one expressive of weary pleasure when he beheld his mistress.

"Thank you," she said to Carlin. And, "Thank you—so much," to Slayton, as she stepped into the hall. To the captain she gave her hand. His look that moment was strangely tender.

"I think we may promise what you most want."

He said no more. Somewhat abruptly he turned away, and followed Slayton to the waiting taxi.

"Better come with me," he suggested, and supplemented it as Slayton wavered: "That is, if I'm in on the expedition to Braun's Wharf."

"Of course, if you will go."

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"Then we'd better be together for the early start."

Slayton acquiesced.

"That's true enough. Thanks for the bid. You remind me of something to be looked up. With all the hustle and excitement since we visited old Colahan I haven't had time to find out at what hour the *Cadiz* sails."

"It's advertised in the papers, no doubt. And they'll be at my flat," the captain observed. He stretched his arms with a profound yawn, and asked:

"Don't you feel rather petered out?"

"Dog-tired."

"A few hours' sleep will pick us up. And no reason I can see why we can't get them. By this time to-morrow Fritz and the woman will be in limbo."

"If they hold him without a warrant. Do you think," asked Slayton, "it would be best, after all, to take up the matter with police headquarters to-night?"

The captain reflected briefly.

"My advice is against it. He might get a tip from some friend in the department, and stay away from the *Cadiz*. Then you'd have to hunt him again."

"But suppose he is protected at the wharf?"

"Let him be," said the captain. "But it's safe to say he has no leave of absence. He is running

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away from his superiors, too. Take that, with the charges of abduction and, let me see—assault, with intent to kill, that we have against him. No other policeman will dare come out in the open to shield him. I count him as ours already.”

“Very well, if you feel sure.”

Each to his own thoughts. And the captain whistled softly, over and over a certain vaguely familiar strain. It was still on his lips as they climbed the stairs to his apartment. Slayton had at last identified it as from the overture to “*Stradella*.”

“Suppose you try last night’s lodging again,” the captain observed as he opened his door. “Get into a dressing-gown, while I have a look at the papers.”

On his return, a few minutes later, Slayton found him pouring a glass of Madeira.

“I can’t find the *Cadiz*,” he said. “She doesn’t seem to be there. Suppose you take a look at the advertisements. Perhaps I overlooked her.”

Slayton pushed aside the monocle resting on an opened paper, and made rapid inspection of announcements of to-morrow’s sailings.

“It isn’t there,” he said presently.

“Then we’d best call the wharf. No office is open at this time of night.”

The captain picked up the telephone directory, and investigated his waistcoat pockets. Then his eyes roved to the near-by table.

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“ Ah.”

His glass duly installed, he began looking for the telephone number.

“ I’ll call,” said Slayton when it was found.

There was no response, till the operator had been urged to repeated ringing. At last a sleepy voice in irate question :

“ Do you think this is an all-night joint? ”

“ I want to know what time the *Cadiz* sails,” Slayton explained pacifically.

“ Why don’t you ask at a decent time? ”

“ Sorry. I’ve just decided to sail on her.”

“ It ought to be eight o’clock.”

“ You aren’t sure? ”

“ That’s the regular time.”

“ Is there no way to make certain? ”

No answer. His informant had hung up.

“ Well, if it’s eight,” said the captain, “ we’ll be there at seven. Let’s turn in. And sleep your prettiest. Patrick will see to it that we wake in season. That is one of his reliable qualities. Trust him. . . . Good-night.”

It was Slayton’s last recollection of the day. That, and slightly veiled brightness of the tenth moon upon his closing eyes.

The same moon that shone when Frank Slayton’s life was suddenly extinguished. A year had passed of deep shadow for Leila. Would it soon be lifted? The man in the moon looked down, as ever lustrous, enigmatic.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CLOSE-UP

GRAY light crept in at the window. And silhouetted against it the captain stood, laying an insistent hand on Slayton's shoulder.

"Second call," he said. "And a dark morning. Are you awake now?"

As mechanism responds to the turn of a lever Slayton's mind picked up the chain of associations.

"I'll be with you in a few minutes."

He threw back the covers. The captain was already in retreat.

"All right," he said over his shoulder. "Breakfast together."

He lounged with a cigarette between his lips, a picture of ease, when Slayton, fresh from a hasty toilet, came hurrying in.

"Patrick's compliments."

"What is it?"

Slayton looked at the extended glass of amber colored liquid.

"I don't know." The captain tossed away his smoke. "But Patrick is a safe guide in such matters. Suppose you endorse my judgment. The toast you drink!"

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To Slayton the mixture's mellow heat recalled once tasted mead. As they turned to breakfast he found the morning papers piled beside his plate.

"Dry stuff, the press," observed the captain unemotionally. "I can't see anything you care for there. But I thought you'd like a look."

"Meaning ——?"

"Not a word about Fritz, or you, or me, or the case. And no mention of the confounded steamer. Nothing at all."

"How long have you been up?"

With surprise Slayton surveyed his clear eyes and unruffled countenance. Under the scrutiny dawned a remote smile.

"It's just habit, you know," he said placidly. "One never sleeps much when he hunts."

"Then I ——" George began.

"No, my dear fellow," the captain interrupted pleasantly. "You're not a born hunter."

A slight cough drew attention to Patrick's face framed by the partly opened door.

"A fine morning, sir."

According to his formula, all weather was good.

"Yes, Patrick," the captain assented. "We'll be down in a few minutes."

They went through the remainder of breakfast with accelerated pace.

Their top-coats donned, Slayton drew the revolver from his pocket, and looked at it doubtfully.

"We're going to meet the police in force," he

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said, responsive to the captain's questioning eye. "There's the Sullivan law ——"

"Be damned," answered the captain briefly.

Judgment thus rendered, they went down to the motor.

"Braun's Wharf," the captain directed. "And we don't care how soon we get there."

Patrick grinned. His start was praiseworthy, but ill-fortune attended. A few blocks down-town the way was blocked by a disabled motor truck. And before the seriousness of its disability could be ascertained the way was filled behind. They sat helpless in a trap, while a red-faced officer raged at the perspiring driver of the blockading car.

"Ever been in Zanzibar?" inquired the captain, as he gazed at a passing organ-grinder, with a grinning monkey perched on his shoulder.

"A little reminder," he went on, and plunged into a tale of a German trader and an ape. Slayton listened, his attention held despite anxiety in visions of the *Cadiz*, with Fritz aboard, steaming away. The story ended, and the blockade was cleared, as the freeing of a key-log releases a river jam.

"You know we have lost time, Patrick," the captain leaned forward to say through the speaking-tube. And Patrick, whose only traffic regulation was his master's whim, responded with zeal.

Thus early in the morning speed later precluded by the volume of midday traffic was physically

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possible. Several crossing policemen who sought to stop them had no luck. And a mounted officer who cantered out to place them under arrest was left profanely examining a barked knee of his mount.

Patrick grinned, and drove the faster. Presently greater congestion of water-front travel compelled some abatement. Still they gained on all in their path.

As a neighboring clock struck the first quarter after seven they rolled down the incline of Braun's Wharf. And Slayton and the captain leaped out.

"Where is the *Cadiz*?" Slayton asked a lounging stevedore.

The man turned a speculative eye on the horizon.

"You just can't see her now," he said.

Not pausing to penetrate this cryptic observation, they hastened in to an office window presided over by a spectacled, spruce young man.

"What time does the *Cadiz* sail?"

"Has sailed," said the clerk placidly.

"But last night," Slayton protested, "I was told she would sail at eight."

"I didn't tell you so."

Then the clerk condescended to explain.

"Eight is the usual time. But something, I guess, came up in the night. Anyway, there was lots of excitement and hustle to get away early this morning."

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"Well, what are schedules for?" Slayton heatedly asked.

"That's it," the clerk pointed out. "There ain't any. You see, she's a freighter that carries some passengers. Can go out any darned old time she pleases. You wasn't intending to go on her, was you?"

Slayton did not answer. He had spotted a policeman outside, absent-mindedly twirling his club as he gazed at something far down the harbor. With the captain at his heels, he hastened out to accost him. And he threw strategy to the winds with a plump question:

"Did Fritz Colahan get away on the *Cadiz*?"

The policeman regarded him suspiciously.

"Are you one of his friends?"

"I expected to meet him here," Slayton answered truthfully enough.

The officer expectorated in the direction of Europe.

"Yes," he said as he turned away. "Fritz is aboard with his dame."

"Rotten luck," observed the captain.

Otherwise, they walked in silence to the upper end of the wharf. Possibilities revolved in Slayton's mind, but came to no clarified conclusion.

"Any suggestion?" he inquired as they entered the motor.

"Apparently," the captain answered, "I have to withdraw my advice."

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“That is ——”

“I said, ‘Don’t go to the police.’ Now I can’t see any other way.”

“You mean to get Fritz off the ship.”

“Too late for that. Extradition when he lands is your suit. I’d put the whole case before the commissioner. Not a bad old party, I’ve heard.”

“I guess you’re right,” Slayton assented on brief reflection. “And there’s no use in delay. If you will drop me at headquarters, I’ll do it now.”

But a power intervened. Presently Patrick stopped abruptly, and a large hand opened the door with unceremonious energy. Followed a scowling face, and part of a uniformed body.

“Are you tired of raising hell all over New York?”

“Meaning?” the captain queried politely.

“That you’re pinched for speeding,” rasped the policeman.

“Oh, a summons. Here’s my card.”

The officer disdained the bit of pasteboard.

“’Tis to the station house you’ll go,” he said roughly.

The captain turned to Slayton.

“Sorry I must drop you. The best of luck with your mission. Let me hear about it later in the day. I’ll be in this evening.”

The gray car rolled away, his captor lolling beside the captain. Slayton stood a moment irresolute, then hailed a taxi.

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"Police headquarters," he directed, "and quick."

It was not far to go. Soon he mounted the dingy steps, and penetrated to the commissioner's outer office. Waiting to present his card, he saw the door of the citadel open. And a surprise issued therefrom.

Alf and "Frisky," with something in their air suggesting they were in custody of a third accompanying policeman. As they beheld Slayton an expression of anxiety was lost in a look of mingled surprise and hatred. With a long backward glance they vanished.

Reading Slayton's name, the commissioner's secretary seemed to sense something important.

"Have a chair," he said, and hurried into the inner office. It was not long to wait. Slayton had hardly completed a mental inventory of surroundings when he beheld himself beckoned in.

A door closed softly, and he found himself in the presence of a large square-shouldered, blue-eyed man, a quiet man, with something at once imperative and impersonal in his regard. Barricaded behind a broad, flat desk, he leaned a little back in his chair, with a card in his hand.

"Well, Mr. Slayton, what can I do for you?"

A soft voice, leisurely used.

"I want to ask a question."

"We are more used to asking questions here than answering them," the commissioner suggested.

"But what do you want to know?"

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“If you will take a man off the *Cadiz*.”

“What man?”

“One of your officers—Fritz Colahan.”

“How do you know he is aboard?”

“I don’t. But I am told so, and have reason to believe it.”

“Why should he be stopped?”

“As one of the murderers of my brother, Frank Slayton.”

The commissioner pressed a button.

“Sit down, Mr. Slayton,” he requested, and gave an order to an entering messenger.

“I thought,” he continued, “you had come with another matter. Are you the Mr. Slayton whose charge of false arrest Judge Falconer reported, with a request for investigation?”

“Yes,” said Slayton. “That was part of the deal to protect the murderers.”

“You think so? Well, here is the book.”

A bulky volume was placed before him.

“On what date was your brother killed?”

“About ten o’clock, the evening of October 23d.”

After some turning of pages the commissioner found what he sought.

“The record of headquarters detectives,” he said, “shows that on that evening Colahan was one of a squad sent to clean out a Harlem gambling house. They left after evening roll-call, and were absent on the assignment until nearly midnight. The party

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remained intact. So it was physically impossible for him to commit a crime on upper Fifth Avenue that evening. Will you see for yourself? ”

With his own eyes Slayton beheld the stunning truth. He read it again, still half-incredulous.

“I felt sure,” he said at length, “that he was guilty.”

“Why? ”

A question like a bullet.

“Because I have seen a ring stolen at the time of the murder on the finger of the woman he ran away with.”

The commissioner tapped his teeth meditatively.

“Now comes the question of fences and thieves. I will tell you in confidence that we do want Colahan—on another charge.”

He hesitated, but went on.

“We have uncovered a nest of thieves in the department. And we’re going to make an example of them.”

His knuckles rapped the desk sharply.

“Colahan has an alibi. But I suppose it’s possible some other officer killed my brother.”

Slayton clung to a forlorn hope, all that remained of his confident theory.

“It’s not impossible.”

The commissioner frowned.

“But I trust you don’t think it probable.”

“I suppose not,” Slayton admitted, feeling himself put on the defensive. “But,” he added, “my

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limited personal experience with the police has been unfortunate.”

“So it seems.”

The commissioner leaned forward, emphasizing his argument with a sharp tapping of his pencil on the desk.

“Only think of this. The lives, the property of every citizen are daily in the care of the police force. What happens the hour their guard is relaxed you know by the experience of Boston, of Liverpool, of any large city that has suddenly been exposed to wolves of the underworld. The criminal gentry know their worth better than you or any other man taking security of purse and person as a natural condition.”

“I didn’t mean to roast the force in general,” said Slayton apologetically.

“I thought not.”

The commissioner leaned back.

“The great majority of my men are brave and honest, and loyal to duty. They resent the crookedness of scamps like Fritz even more than you do. For in a way it bespatters their own reputation. Far from blocking, as I gather you’d expect, they will do their level best to help clean out a nest of rascals that somehow slipped into their uniform.”

“Please believe me ——” Slayton began, feeling something expected of him. But the commissioner went on:

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"The trail will be followed, wherever it runs. As to your own case, the seeming injustice of false arrest will be my personal charge. And if a new lead opens in the matter of your brother's death, there will be no standing pat on the conviction already secured. . . . Is that satisfactory to you?"

"Thank you," said Slayton, and rose to go.

In despondent mood he proceeded to the club, and straight to his room. There at length, but ineffectually, he pondered the situation. Through Alf and "Frisky" to Fritz, and the stolen ring. With conversations overheard his feeling they were all somehow involved in his brother's death still amounted to conviction.

But how to establish it? A second start with the tangled skein must now await the forced return of Fritz from South America. That would only be to face a charge of theft. On the major issue he would still have to go alone, with such assistance as the captain might lend. Or private detectives, if he turned to them.

Meantime the court calendar held an assignment of Leila's second trial. Between luncheon and the somewhat perfunctory process of dinner he more than once looked longingly at the telephone. He was eager to talk with her. Yet dreaded it, doubting if even at the other end of the wire he could hide from her the collapse of his campaign so confidently undertaken to establish her inno-

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cence. She must know soon. But not yet, while a shred of hope adhered.

The captain. Ah, that was different. He turned to that paragon of optimism with a feeling of illogical relief.

The number given, he listened at the telephone, and heard the ringing. No immediate response. But after the second summons out of the darkness came the captain's voice, characteristically casual:

"Yes. What's wanted?"

"It's Slayton. How did you fare?"

"I? Oh, a little matter of bail. Nothing to worry about. How did you come out?"

"It couldn't have been much worse. Fritz has an alibi."

"The deuce he has!"

Slayton heard the captain softly whistle.

"Can you give it to me," he asked presently, "in a few words?"

"Yes. Department records show that the evening Frank was killed he went in a squad to raid a gambling den in Harlem. The job lasted until nearly midnight. He wasn't near Fifth Avenue."

"Well, that's a blow."

After brief cogitation the captain resumed:

"How about the ring then? Were you mistaken about that?"

"No. There's the forlorn hope. I have a tip from the commissioner that Fritz is suspected of

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being one of a police gang in cahoots with thieves. The only trail in sight leads back that way."

"A scurvy prospect, isn't it?"

What he might have uttered was checked on Slayton's lips by a strange feeling of suspension. An impression that the captain, though silent, held the stage, wishing to speak.

"What time is set for Mrs. Slayton's second trial?" he asked presently.

"About the middle of next month."

Slayton heard the tapping of a finger-nail.

"That's bad, isn't it? You could hardly get at this new lead."

"It's a poor prospect."

More tapping, ending staccato.

"Well, there's a way out of everything. At least, I've found it so."

A measure of confidence had returned to the captain's voice.

"My dear fellow," he went on, "is it asking too much if I put you to the bother of ringing me again this evening?"

"Of course not," said Slayton.

"Then say ten o'clock, or thereabouts. An idea has come to me, and I'd like a little time to mull it over. It might help you out of your hole."

"Let's hope so. Till ten, then."

As Slayton hung up he glanced at his watch. A trifle after nine. He picked up a book, and almost immediately put it down. No mood to read. Nor

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yet to think, with a start on the only problem he could keep in mind locked in the captain's brain.

He took refuge in *solitaire*. And the bank piled up great imaginary winnings. . . . Ten o'clock at last. With fearful eagerness he stepped to the telephone. The captain answered promptly.

"Is that you, Slayton?"

"Yes. What's ——"

"You were going to say, 'What's the word.' I can't give it to you now. Can you come down here to-morrow morning about ten?"

"Surely."

"All right. I think I can promise you rather good news."

"Nothing now?"

Slayton could not resist the question.

"No. Not now. Give me time to ripen it."

"It's nothing I can help on?"

"Not a bit. All you can do to-night is go to sleep. Come fresh in the morning. Good-night. And good hunting, always."

"Good-night to you. And thanks."

As he spoke it was Slayton's feeling that the captain had already hung up. What had he in mind to impart that tone of confidence? Had something come to his attention between forenoon and sunset? Where had he been to have the Slayton case in any way touch him?

George went out to the street, and for two hours walked vigorously. And he came back without the

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faintest clue in mind. He had gleaned, however, the inertia of muscular fatigue. Of late sought studiously, sleep took him almost immediately, when he had composed himself in bed. He went down to unconsciousness as the drowning man makes his last serene exit beneath the waves.

He woke to sunlight slipping past the drawn curtains. And the hum of day's resumed activities came from below faintly to his ears. A hasty glance at his watch. Eight-thirty. Throwing back the covers, he went briskly to his bath. No time to lose.

By some readjustment,—sleep's healing, plus hope, the world's face had brightened. What the captain had discovered was a mystery he gave up. But his mere assurance inspired hope.

In the ride down-town random conjectures persisted. But they came to nothing. At the curb in front of the captain's apartment Patrick was examining his beloved car. He looked up with a grin of welcome as Slayton stepped from his cab.

"Yes, sir. I think the captain is expecting you, sir. Would you go right up? The captain told me to leave the catch down."

Slayton climbed to the third floor. It was rather dark in the hall. But the captain's bell was just at the head of the stairs. He rang, and waited a minute. No response. Then he remembered Patrick's suggestion regarding the lock, and entered.

The same room in which he had his first conversa-

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tion with the captain. He looked about curiously, as one finding himself in a slightly known place alone. A hat and coat presumably worn earlier in the morning were dropped on a chair.

A clock on the mantel chimed in the stillness,—unheeded. Slayton's eyes were on the table that stood in the centre of the room, laden with various things; on a photograph that stood propped against the base of a lamp. That remembered face before which his heart had seemed to stop its beating. So like Leila, as she must have been before there came to her the wisdom of pain.

And beside it—what? He drew nearer. A square white envelope bearing his name. He took it up, to read again the superscription in the captain's fine precise hand.

The envelope was unsealed. Yet he delayed opening it, each instant anticipating the captain's return. At length he drew forth the enclosure, quite voluminous and closely written, and read it. Slowly, for almost he distrusted his eyes:

“DEAR SLAYTON:

“This seems the best I can do for you. And, all things considered, I do not think you will judge me harshly for failing to do it sooner. Of course, I never meant to let Mrs. Slayton suffer a penalty of the law for her husband's death. For mental anguish she has endured I am more than sorry. It happened things got rather out of hand. And I see no chance to make the cards run well for me as matters stand.

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“Now it seems best for me to admit that I shot Frank Slayton. It was unpremeditated. The result of opportunity, and sudden impulse. But I'll not deny it gave me lasting satisfaction. The wish for his removal was long in mind.

“The night it happened I passed your father's house several times. Now and then I had yielded to the impulse to do so. Because Leila Slayton, whom I knew by sight alone, was so like her dead sister, Constance. And Constance is the woman I am unable to forget. I hated Frank,—as I hate him still, for coming between us.

“I am called a cold man. The truth is, I am only self-contained. And that with men of my own race. Naturally passionate, as a boy I was undisciplined. And I was guilty of a wrong so grievous it persisted in memory, a check on hot impulse. Even so there are affairs in my relations with savage races it will be good utterly to forget. And faces that were fair emerge from the past, so that I wonder how, if ever, they will greet me again.

“But I seem to apologize where I proposed only to explain. Other women I have loved, and had their favor. But the memory of Constance has been unending pain. And the keenness of that pang, Slayton, nourished hatred of your brother I never felt for any other man.

“She was so like Leila, the sister I know you love. But to me more beautiful; unforgettable because never possessed. It may be that, much older as I was, time would not have served me. Still Frank, young and adroit in the siege of woman, as you well know, came between us when I fancied she had softened toward me.

“It was at a little place in the Scottish lake

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region, one summer before the war. Not a house party. We were domiciled under three roofs. The village vicar assembled the triangle. A situation presently dramatic. Constance could not distinguish between attentions paid her. Nor did I realize that where I was desperately earnest Frank felt only the competitive interest of a game. At least, that seems a fair assumption.

"She refused me gently. And when I, presumptuously, pressed for a reason I realized without direct admission that Frank was the favored man. Then he suddenly departed. Without proposing, I knew. Much as she strove to hide it, I saw her wonder and sorrow. Soon she, too, went away from the one guessing her secret. A few months later she died. Death of fever, they called it. But I always have felt Frank killed her. And robbed me.

"That is the story Leila cannot know. For, knowing it, she could not have married him. As to him, no doubt the fact he was betraying you, and taking the younger sister of a girl whose heart he had broken, was a fillip in marriage. In my considerable acquaintance with the world he is one of the few to qualify as a moral monster. I have never for a second regretted his removal.

"The night it happened I passed the house once, seeing no one. The second time I saw two men of nondescript appearance in conversation with a policeman on the neighboring corner. The third time I approached from the other side, just as the pair I remembered turned sharply in from the street to a passage between your father's house and one next door.

"Their manner was furtive. Something moved

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me to investigate, after I had gone on a bit. There was no policeman in sight. From what I saw, and later heard, I judge he was purposely elsewhere. But his behavior has no bearing on what I am telling here.

"I found the passage empty. But an open first story window tempted me in. I yielded. You, Slayton, were asleep in a chair by the library table. I passed you easily, and went on up the stairs. The thing was ridiculously easy. And absolutely foolish, one might say. At that moment I was a house-breaker with no purpose in mind.

"When half-way up the flight extinguishment of lights in the hall above gave me pause. I listened, and heard faint murmurs of voices. It was pitch dark when I reached the top of the stairs. But I saw faint brightness in a doorway near by. With a few steps the door-knob was under my hand. Apparently from some room, the voices seemed nearer now. I pushed the door open a little—noiselessly—and stepped in.

"It may have been Fate guiding me. Back to me, and a few feet distant, Frank Slayton stood listening. He, too, had heard sounds. But he never suspected my presence, And no other person heard, or saw me. I used a silencer for pistols not on the market.

"The impulse to fire was as irresistible as if I had come for no other purpose. I would as readily have put an end to some deadly snake. He did not move after he fell. I think my shot extinguished consciousness instantly.

"I dropped the revolver beside the body, and went out. The hall was still dark; apparently, empty. I left the house by the front door, noting

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you were still asleep in the library. What I did not note at the time was the loss of my eye-glass. Later I got that back when you carelessly put it down on my table, and I more carelessly took it up and used it. By all the rules of the game, as novelists and criminologists lay them down, that should have resulted in my undoing.

“But you missed the chance, being too much a gentleman, my dear fellow, to be a good detective. Another clue, you missed the day I made a foolish remark about the pistol with which Frank was killed. With a more suspicious nature it would have occurred to you that one whose knowledge of the Slayton case commenced with service as a juror in the trial could not have known something found by the police, but not testified to.

“Nobody said on the stand that the revolver was of a French make. Its mate you will find in my despatch box, with the eye-glass you had and lost. Tactically, leaving the revolver was a mistake. I thought the burglars would take it away. And the matter of increased criminal responsibility for them seemed of small consequence. Their shrewdness in placing the weapon in Mrs. Slayton’s dresser gave the case its unexpected turn.

“From the first I meant to save her. Naturally, I preferred also to keep my own life. Service as a juror seemed a happy chance. I lost there through the obstinacy of stupid men.

“Let me say here, and will you interest yourself on his behalf?—that Abraham Hurwicz deserves clemency. He allowed a process server’s mistake to stand at my request. Once he was my man on an African expedition, And I found him always honest and faithful. But I had to expose him to give Mrs. Slayton another chance.

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"Your clue pointing to the man Fritz seemed promising. He is evidently a rascal who might well serve to satisfy the law. I trust this avowal will not shock you much. Keep in mind the fact that I have lived in places where the strong man's will is law. That is the righteousness of nature.

"Fritz now appears to have his alibi. And the prospect of connecting thieves I so nearly grazed that night is—too remote. As a sportsman, there remain two things for me to do: To confess, which I have done to you. And to make my last exit; that I am about to do.

"I have seen much of life. In the aggregate it is remembered with pleasure. Thus I am less disposed to live as a fugitive. And I am by no means disposed to offer myself to the hangman.

"The great charm of existence to me has been its unexpectedness. I pray you do not think of me as turning in despair to the greatest adventure of all. Who knows?

"I send you the long greeting as I turn west.

"THOMAS CLIFFORD."

There was something mesmeric in the firm signature. Slayton could not turn from it. Until Patrick spoke behind him:

"Excuse me, sir. Could you tell what is wrong with the captain?"

He followed the agitated servant into the adjoining room. In a big chair by a window Captain Clifford reclined, wrapped in his purple dressing-gown. He seemed to sleep.

"He doesn't answer, sir," said Patrick.

The right arm rested, so that the hand seemed

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extended in welcome. Slayton touched the wrist. Still warm, but pulseless. As he stooped the half-open eyes seemed to regard him with a friendly look, and that familiar half-ironic gleam. To his nostrils came an odor like that of almonds from a little phial on the floor.

“What is it?”

It was Leila's voice from the doorway.

“You here!”

Slayton beheld her with astonishment.

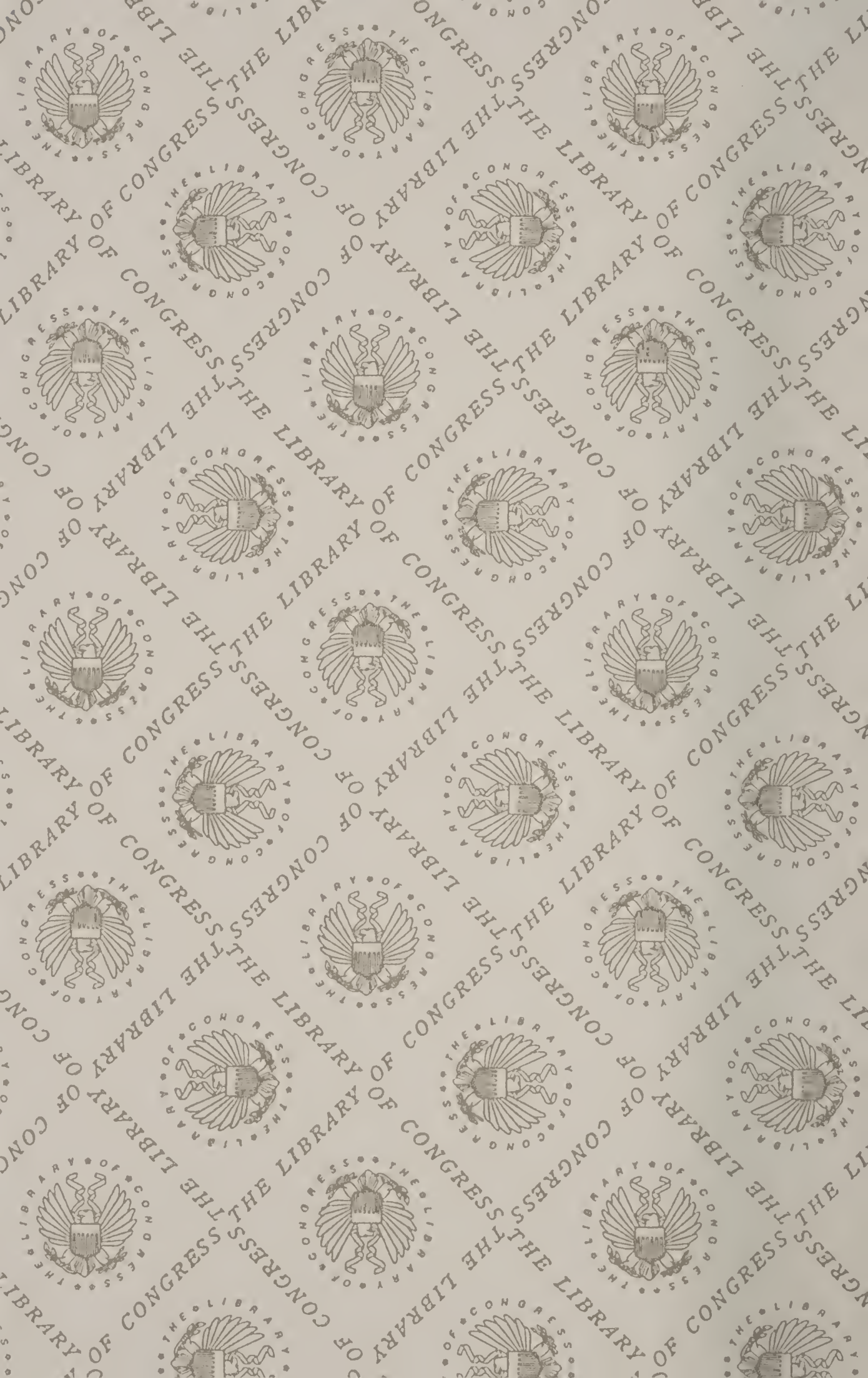
“Captain Clifford sent a note asking me to come,” she explained. “He said he had something to tell me. And you would be here. What is it, please?”

She took from his hand the extended letter.

“The captain,” he said, “has told us all.”

THE END

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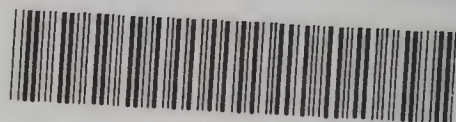


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